**Chapter 4**

**Theater Commander: The Sinai Campaign**

**The Road to War: The Geostrategic Shift**

The events leading to the Sinai Campaign were the result of much broader political and geopolitical developments than the Israeli-Egyptian conflict – the start of the Cold War and the end of colonialism. Great Britain and France, the great imperial powers of the past, were struggling to retain their power as former colonies emerged as independent nations and were trying to position themselves in the international system. These developments coincided with developments in the relations between Egypt and Israel, causing these historic processes to come together to create “a perfect storm”: when the interests of the two fading world powers and those of the tiny nascent nation corresponded, a tripartite Israeli-French-British collusion was born.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Each of the world powers had its own interests. Great Britain, the most important global power in the Middle East for the first half of the twentieth century, had interests in a number of locations throughout the region. In the early 1950s, Great Britain still had military forces in Egypt and wielded considerable influence in Iraq, and the Jordanian Legion operated under the command of British officers.[[2]](#footnote-2) Following its troop withdrawal from Egypt in 1954, Great Britain came to find Jordan, with which it had signed a defense treaty in March 1948, more strategically important than ever before.

In the wake of Nasser’s seizure of power in Egypt, Great Britain, with the United States as mediator, was forced to withdraw its troops from Egypt and the Suez Canal region and thus became reliant on Egyptian goodwill to be able to control the Canal, even though it was owned by a British company. Israel followed these developments with increasing anxiety, creating an atmosphere that proved fertile ground for the ill-fated “Lavon Affair.” This involved an attempt by Israel’s intelligence services to disrupt Great Britain’s departure from Egypt by activating a cell of local Egyptian Jews in the early 1950s, at a time when Egypt was negotiating the future of the Suez Canal. They were to sabotage Western installations in the country in a way that would incriminate an Egyptian nationalistic underground organization. The cell failed in its objective, thereby earning the whole affair the sobriquet *ha’esek habish* (“The Unfortunate Affair” or “The Bad Business”), which damaged Israel’s image for the British who already viewed the new state as an obstacle to their efforts to impose order in the Middle East and retain its influence there.

After granting independence to its protectorates – Lebanon in 1943 and Syria in 1946 – France followed Middle East developments and their impact on its North African colonies with concern. France and Great Britain had a common interest in the Middle East because of their joint ownership of the Suez Canal. Together with the United States, they arranged to restrict weapons sales to Arab nations and Israel in an attempt to contain the Arab-Israeli confrontation. Of additional concern to these Western nations was the expansion of Soviet influence; they saw Egypt, with its size, strategic location, and the Suez Canal, as the keystone on which Middle East stability rested.[[3]](#footnote-3)

However, over time, cracks appeared in their supposedly joint interests. The United States administrations under Presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower were hostile toward Great Britain, viewing its presence and activity as a continuation of the old imperialism, which it considered destined for extinction. The Americans managed to mediate between the British and the Egyptians over the arrangement of Great Britain’s military withdrawal, but the United States’ refusal to provide arms to Egypt made Egypt look to the Soviet Union to fill the gap. The Soviets, who in 1948 had supported the establishment of Israel, viewing it as advancing its interest in ousting the British from the Middle East, began to favor the Arabs. For Josef Stalin, Egypt was a zone of British influence, but once the USSR realized that Great Britain was withdrawing from the region, it felt its own time had come for domination. In 1951, when Egypt began preventing Israeli ships from passing through the Suez Canal – in contravention of the Convention of Constantinople guaranteeing free passage through the Suez Canal[[4]](#footnote-4) – the USSR abstained from voting in the U.N. resolution condemning Egypt.[[5]](#footnote-5) At the end of 1953, after already viewing Israel as part of the Western bloc, the Soviet Union began exercising its veto on anti-Egyptian resolutions. In 1954, they started to promise Egypt weapons deals and civilian aid, including assistance for the grandiose Aswan High Dam project.

Once the canal was nationalized, the Israeli-Egyptian trajectory intersected the British/French-Egyptian one. Just as Israel’s view of the Czech arms of September 1955 deal (called “Czech” to obscure the fact that the Soviet Union was the actual source), began the countdown to a clash with Egypt, the global powers’ view of the July 26, 1956 declaration on the nationalization of the Suez Canal began their countdown to action.

Having prevented Israeli ships from sailing through the Suez Canal since 1951, in 1953 Egypt also denied freedom of shipping to any known Israeli ship flying a foreign flag. That year, Egypt also blocked the Straits of Tiran, and in September 1955, it extended its blockade to the airspace above the Straits.[[6]](#footnote-6) All these acts contravened treaties and international law. In September 1954, Israel, under the leadership of Moshe Sharett, a believer in international diplomacy, tried to rouse the world to act against Egypt for its gross violation of international law, sending the merchant vessel *Bat Galim* to the Suez Canal. As expected, the Egyptian police raided the ship and arrested all aboard. To Israel’s great disappointment, the international response was tepid. Not only that, but the three superpowers’ 1950 agreement not to provide weapons to the sides harmed Israel the most. The Western powers determined that they needed to ensure a balance of arms between Israel and each Arab nation separately, whereas Israel viewed itself as facing a coalition of Arab states.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The crises between Israel and Egypt through 1954 and 1955 did not slide into war for two reasons: neither side was militarily prepared, and the Western powers exerted their influence. Israel was primarily worried about the British response, as Great Britain had highly significant interests in the region. In November 1955, Dayan prepared the Omer Plan designed to seize Sharm al-Sheikh and open the Straits of Tiran to shipping to and from Eilat and presented it to Ben-Gurion. But the next month Ben-Gurion told Dayan that the government was opposed to such an operation, because should it fail and Egypt seize parts of the Negev, it would provide Great Britain grounds for returning the Negev to Egypt and Jordan.[[8]](#footnote-8) Egypt, too, could not allow itself to defy the Western powers at this point.

The combustible Egypt-Israel situation was a cause of concern to the West, leading those nations to try to regulate the Middle East through various alliances and pacts. One such attempt, the Baghdad Pact, angered Nasser, who, viewing it as more of the same old imperialism, responded by signing a defense treaty with Syria.[[9]](#footnote-9) The goal of the United States and Great Britain in the region was to maintain stable patron-client relations to curb Soviet penetration, along with ensuring the supply of oil, freedom of shipping, and other economic and national interests. To stabilize the situation, they proposed various initiatives, the most important of which was Operation Alpha, a joint U.S. State Department and British Foreign Office initiative predicated on far-reaching Israeli concessions to appease the Arabs.[[10]](#footnote-10) Egypt was supposed to be compensated for being willing to agree to peace with Israel, in part because of concern that this very unpopular step would endanger Nasser’s regime. The British, intent on acquiring their goodwill at Israel’s expense, took a stance of appeasement and courting the Arab nations. The interests of all the Western nations were ostensibly congruent, but this appearance was a superficial one. While the British tried to preserve the advantages of the old order, the Americans believed the era of colonialism to be over and that they could and would build a new American order on the ruins of the old. Naively, the Americans believed that their anti-colonialist stance would help them reap benefits from the nations of the region.

The common perception in the halls of the U.S. State Department and Whitehall was that the Israeli-Arab conflict was the obstacle standing between the West and the Arabs. Therefore, the West intended to demand that Israel make extensive territorial concessions in the Negev, in the north, and at the Sea of Galilee, agree to the internationalization of Jerusalem, and take in some of the Palestinian refugees who had fled or expelled during Israel’s War of Independence. All of these were to be done in exchange for guaranteeing Israel’s security, although without a full peace agreement.[[11]](#footnote-11) The U.S. attitude was somewhat more moderate, if only because of concern over the American Jewish vote.[[12]](#footnote-12)

At the end of 1955, while Israel was – for obvious reasons – opposing Operation Alpha, which in practice would have meant the elimination of the state, Egypt deceived the West, having already decided to ally itself with the Soviet Union. Only partially aware, the Americans tried to promote a new initiative, this one the CIA’s. Robert Anderson was dispatched to the Middle East to jumpstart the new plan but the project was an abject failure. The outcome reinforced Israel’s assessment that Nasser was set on waging war.[[13]](#footnote-13) Consequently, Israel became unwilling to trust various promises and guarantees and demanded that the United States provide it with arms as well as direct negotiations between the sides. Despite Anderson’s many efforts, Nasser refused any direct contact with Israel. It gradually became clear to all the parties that Nasser was not really interested in a meaningful settlement with Israel. Operation Alpha was buried in the winter of 1956, after which Nasser’s relations with the British and the Americans rapidly deteriorated. During 1956, Nasser had been busy trying to unite the Arab world under his leadership, severing ties with the West, and relying on the Soviet Union for assistance.[[14]](#footnote-14) Furthermore, the American attempt to withhold arms from Israel to prevent the possibility of war only increased Israel’s worry, paradoxically bringing it closer to the brink of war.

Once it understood that the mediators’ attempts to achieve a peace agreement had proven futile, Israel focused its efforts on acquiring weapons. In the spring of 1956, it became clear that the United States would definitely not provide Israel with arms. Instead, thanks to intensive work on the part of Defense Ministry Director General Shimon Peres, assisted by Dayan, salvation was to come, oddly enough, from France.

France had unambiguous interests in the Arab world: it wanted to maintain its influence in its once colonies of Syria and Lebanon and its ownership of the Suez Canal through the Suez Canal Company, controlled by French and British interests. But, above all, the French consideration was Algeria. The French colony where a million French citizens lived was in the grips of an uprising against the French regime, and the French were convinced that the rebels were receiving not only moral but also military support from Nasser.

For the French, then, Nasser was a strategic enemy; nor were the British pleased with him. Nasser had developed self-confidence, perhaps because of the Soviet card he had up his sleeve, and was starting to nettle the West, especially the British. He exerted his influence on the Arab nations to oppose the Baghdad Pact, and in October 1955 he signed a defense treaty with Syria and Saudi Arabia. He provoked Israel primarily by pulling the strings of the other Arab nations – Jordan and Syria – to isolate the pro-Western Iraq. For example, Nasser instigated the anti-Baghdad Pact riots in Jordan. In March 1956, King Hussein dismissed Glubb Pasha and his British officers, purging the Jordanian Legion of foreigners to prove he was not a British puppet. The British believed that Nasser was behind this step as well and began to take a new line, isolating Nasser and weakening, perhaps even toppling him. The Americans had grown tired of Nasser and his rejection of the peace initiatives and regretted the generous assistance they had offered to build the Aswan High Dam. In July of 1956, the U.S. Congress voted to end the financial aid earmarked for the project.

The pressure from the Western powers, aimed at making Nasser change his policy, actually resulted in the opposite: Nasser declared his decision to nationalize the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956.[[15]](#footnote-15) He had calculated this step carefully: it served both his domestic and his external interests. He stationed forces near the Canal but assumed that Britain and France would not attack. However, that is not quite how things turned out. In terms of the array of forces and interests, the nationalization of the Suez Canal was a crystallizing moment. France, interested in ousting Nasser, who was supporting the Algerian rebels, provided Israel – looking for a preemptive war with Egypt – with weapons and training. It was only natural that the two sides would try to translate their mutual interests into joint action. Only Great Britain was needed to complete the puzzle. Although diminished, Great Britain was still an important world power maintaining significant armed forces in the Middle East as well as an enormous navy. Still, compared to Israel and France, the British position in the region was more complicated. More on this below.

**The Treaty with France**

In terms of relations with Israel, France filled the vacuum left by Great Britain and the United States. The French and Israeli views about the Middle East were similar, and the two countries forged a closer relationship – “the beginning of a beautiful friendship.”[[16]](#footnote-16) The close ties between Israel and France had actually coalesced long before the Suez Canal nationalization and now both nations embarked on a path of cooperation against Nasser. Another factor in the warming relations was France’s socialist leadership’s sympathy for Israel. For example, at the same time that French diplomats were submitting their government’s official protest to the Security Council on Operation Kinneret – an Israeli reprisal mission against Syrian positions in December of 1955 – the diplomats were also transmitting sympathetic messages on the outstanding operation via bilateral diplomatic channels.[[17]](#footnote-17) France’s need to find new markets for its military industry’s products also contributed to their burgeoning relationship with Israel. The nationalization of the Suez Canal in July 1956 simply accelerated all these processes, as France was eager to act immediately, having identified Nasser as a clear and present danger. However, the primary reason the two nations fell into one another’s arms was as old as the history of humanity itself: my enemy’s enemy is my friend.

While initially hesitant, France soon solidified its support for Israel after receiving proof of Nasser’s backing the Algerian rebels– thanks to information that Israeli intelligence passed on to France. In October 1955, the French prime minister already promised to supply Israel with advanced planes, and on April 11, 1956, three Mystère VIs arrived in Israel, the first of a deal for 24 aircraft. But the crucial change came with the establishment of a new French government – a coalition between the Popular Republican Movement (Mouvement Républicain Populaire) and the Radical Socialists, whose common denominator at the time was their sympathy for Israel. Prime Minister Guy Mollet and Defense Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury were very supportive of Israel personally. Peres leveraged the opportunity to submit an extraordinary acquisitions request: Vautour bombers, 60 Mystères, and hundreds of tanks and cannons. On April 30, Peres reported to Dayan that Bourgès-Maunoury had hinted of the possibility of a meaningful change in France’s policy towards Israel. An understanding between the two nations quickly emerged: France would secretly arm Israel not only far from the prying eyes of the Americans and the British but also without the knowledge of its own foreign ministry, the Quai d’Orsay. Israel submitted its shopping list to France in June 1956, and to its astonishment, it was fully approved. Over the next few months, 200 tanks and 72 Mystère VIs were shipped to Israel. The IDF’s force construction was starting in earnest.

Another impetus for the Israeli-French bond came after Israel’s intelligence managed to intercept messages exchanged among Egypt, Italy, and Switzerland. While Israel was unable to decipher the message in full, it was certain they were connected to Algeria and would therefore interest the French. France’s espionage services were excited to receive the material, and with the support of the prime minister and minister of Algerian affairs – again without informing the Quai d’Orsay – it was decided to hold a secret conference. On June 22, 1956, Shimon Peres, Military Intelligence Director Yehoshua Harkaby, and Moshe Dayan flew to Paris, their final destination being a chateau in the town of Vermars. The conference was chaired by Pierre Bourcisot, Director of the SDECE (Service de Documentation Extérieure et de Contre-Espionnage), along with Gen. Maurice Challe, the Deputy Chief of Staff and a committed friend of Israel. Also in attendance were French intelligence and operations officers.

The Vermars conference lasted two days and resulted in two agreements. The first was to provide Israel with arms, including 72 Mystère aircraft, 200 AMX-13 light tanks, and upgraded Sherman tanks,[[18]](#footnote-18) as well as ammunition and spare parts Israel was desperate to have. The second agreement involved what Israel would provide France in return: intelligence, including Israeli help in gathering information on Egypt’s role in the Algerian rebellion.

At the conference, Dayan explained to his French interlocutors that Nasser’s objectives were the unification of the whole Arab world, the ouster of the West from the Arab nations, and a treaty with the Soviets. Dayan noted that Nasser could not attain these goals without defeating Israel, which represented both a geographical and national obstacle. Therefore, the joint French-Israeli interests were obvious: ousting Nasser or at least thwarting his objectives. The French accepted Dayan’s analysis but thought that toppling Nasser at that point was a political decision to be made by higher-ranking officials.[[19]](#footnote-19)

In his memoirs, Dayan noted that his self-confidence was bolstered in the wake of these talks. Although it was not the first time he had participated in negotiations with foreign or international parties, it was the first time he led and chaired a delegation. “Ben-Gurion had instructed me, but that didn’t bother me. There was no conflict between my opinions and the policy he set out. I accepted Ben-Gurion not just because of his formal authority, but because I saw him as a political and national mentor who stood head and shoulders above everyone around him.”[[20]](#footnote-20) Dayan took pride in the respect France showed for the experience Israel had gained in the reprisal operations: “When we discussed military actions, they looked up to us. I enjoyed seeing that.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

The Vermars conference dramatically improved Israel’s security situation, with the primary significance of its decisions was allowing Israel to implement an offensive doctrine and strike Egypt on Egyptian soil. Another important outcome was the postponement of the conflict by a few months, allowing the IDF to take possession of the equipment and train its units to use it. Upon his return from France, Dayan noted in an interview with the military journal *Bamahaneh* that the IDF was facing three challenges: cutting routine operational budgets and using the money on acquisitions; integrating the equipment and training the troops to use it; and strengthening army discipline.

In early July 1965, weapons and ammunition started arriving from France by clandestine French flotillas sailing for Israeli ports. At Ben-Gurion’s recommendation, Dayan appointed Haim Laskov – reputed to have good organizational skills – to spearhead the establishment of the training programs for the fighters and the units, despite the fact that Dayan and the British-trained Laskov had been at loggerheads when the latter was the chief commander of the armored corps. But Laskov also wanted an armored corps capable of fighting deep within enemy territory and with the ability to breach fronts and advance quickly, an approach underpinning every Israeli move. For the first time ever, such moves were within reach thanks to the purchase of French armor. Dayan also appointed Meir Amit, an officer he respected and trusted implicitly, to lead Military Intelligence.

The Israeli Air Force was vastly improved by the receipt of the Mystères, but integrating them into the system required large sums of money, while training the pilots involved quite a lot of time. When the war broke out, the IAI had 48 planes, but only one squadron was operated by Israelis, with the rest flown by French airmen. Despite the secrecy, it seems that the Americans were following Israel’s force construction closely: at the beginning of October, President Dwight Eisenhower was heard to remark that those “12” Mystère fighters seemed to have “a rabbit-like capacity for multiplication.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Ben-Gurion and Dayan got to work on Israel’s part of the deal. Having proven its expertise in reprisals, Israel promised to plan various actions against Algerian rebel bases located in Libya and Tunisia. Israel also offered to help with intelligence gathering.[[23]](#footnote-23) However, before these intentions could be realized, another shift would occur that would change all the plans. After the weapons and munitions arrived from France, Dayan again decided to focus on integrating equipment and completing force construction before sending the IDF out on a large-scale operation. However, following the murder of two workers on the road to Eilat on July 9, 1956, a strange role reversal took place: while Ben-Gurion suggested responding with a reprisal, Dayan opposed the idea. He had different priorities: “If we bombard a large police station or something like that, we jeopardize the acquisitions operation. The French can stick to the deal only if the situation in Israel is not too tense and the United States and Great Britain don’t make any problems.” Contrary to his prior tendency, he now preferred to avoid actions liable to exacerbate the situation.[[24]](#footnote-24)

**Near-War with Great Britain**

Several unplanned and uncontrollable events disrupted Dayan’s plans. Israel retaliated to acts of sabotage originating in Jordan with force, and Jordan responded in kind. With the deterioration along the Jordanian border, Britain, Jordan’s patron, became embroiled to the point of danger of a military clash with Israel. From this point until the start of the Sinai Campaign, two clashing axes of conduct ran alongside one another, a situation historian Edward Luttwak called “strategic confusion.” One the one hand, there was the emerging axis of cooperation among Israel, France, and Britain in establishing a military coalition to lead a major attack on Egypt, while, on the other, as if in a parallel universe, there were escalating tensions that almost led to an armed confrontation between Israel and the Britain because of the events on the Jordanian-Israeli border. It seems that only figures such as Ben-Gurion and Dayan were capable of skillfully handling so deeply contradictory a strategic situation, one that, Dayan, with typical brilliance, even managed to turn to Israel’s advantage.

In 1955, the Jordanian border had been fairly peaceful thanks to the deployed Legion stopping infiltrations. But because the command ranks, along with their commander Lt. Gen. Sir John Glubb, were expelled in March 1956, discipline in the Jordanian Legion deteriorated, and the sector again heated up in July. During August and September, firefights and sabotage near the border resumed, this time with the involvement of Jordanian soldiers. In response, the Israeli paratroopers raided several Jordanian targets: on September 11, Israeli forces attacked the al-Rahwa fortification near Hebron. In this raid, the legendary Meir Har-Zion was wounded, and Dayan stood by his bedside in the hospital until Har-Zion regained consciousness.[[25]](#footnote-25)

Two days later, the paratroopers attacked the Jordanian fortification of Arendel, and on September 25, in the course of Operation Lulav, they raided the village of Hassan and a nearby fortification. These actions were carried out after Israel, in early September, received information from France that Israel might be included in the campaign being planned against Egypt.[[26]](#footnote-26)

One might have assumed that after the British officers were expelled from Jordan the British obligation to the kingdom would have diminished, but, in fact, it intensified. Great Britain became even more eager to prove its commitment, hoping to keep Jordan from turning to Nasser for help. Thus, the Jordanians enjoyed the protection of British power, still considerable, without having to lift a finger in return.[[27]](#footnote-27) In September 1956, following several Israeli raids, Whitehall warned Israel that it would activate its defense treaty with Jordan.

The British threat was real. As early as June 1955, the British General Staff had prepared a detailed plan – Catapult, later renamed Encounter – for a military attack on Israel should the defense treaty with Jordan be implemented. The first stage of the plan involved the destruction of the Israeli Air Force by attacking its airfields and other strategic installations. The second stage included Royal Air Force assistance to British ground troops and a British aerial and naval blockade on Israel. A memorandum to the Chief of the RAF Staff in London prepared by Claude Pelly, commander of all RAF units in the Middle East, read, “Damage to civilian installations and harm to civilians are inevitable.” The RAF estimated that the IAF (most of it fleet of planes still had piston-powered engines) would be a tough enemy but that it would be possible to defeat it within two weeks. In February 1956, the plan was approved, and its name changed to Cordage.[[28]](#footnote-28)

Conflict with the British was avoided thanks to cooperation with France. The highest ranks of the British military demanded the government decide either to embark on Operation Musketeer with Israel against Nasser or activate Operation Cordage. The absurdity reached a peak when the British High Command explained to the government that it was best to attack Israel first; unless this were done, Israel might exploit the opportunity and attack Jordan again once British troops were busy with Musketeer. Despite Israel’s decision to maintain its cool, another case of murder of Israelis led to the Qalqilya reprisal on October 10, 1956. The reprisal went awry and turned into a large firefight, necessitating Israeli Air Force support.

As the troops were fighting, a political drama was unfolding. King Hussein, worried Israel was intent on total war with Jordan, called Gen. Sir Charles Keightley, British Commander in Chief Middle East Land Forces, to demand activation of their defense treaty. The British informed the Israelis of the Jordanian request, advising that they were considering intervention. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden wrote in his memoir that, “We were called on to help and our planes were ready to take off.”[[29]](#footnote-29) The next day, October 12, the British let Israel know that they intended to allow an Iraqi division to enter Jordan, a step that, for Israel, would cross a red line. The British legal representative, Westlock, told Ben-Gurion, “If Israel takes military action, Britain will side with Jordan.” Ben-Gurion replied that Israel reserved its right to act freely.[[30]](#footnote-30) Both in Israel and around the world, the strong impression was that war was about to break out on Israel’s eastern front,[[31]](#footnote-31) but, for now, the entry of the Iraqi forces was postponed. Instead, the force placed itself near the Jordanian border.

The events on Israel’s eastern border made Ben-Gurion suspect the motivations of the British, in whom he had little trust to begin with, and this made it very difficult to generate cooperation with the two world powers against Egypt. These suspicions were heightened when it emerged on October 15 that the function the British had assigned to Israel in the operation was to provide Britain with a pretext: it would play the aggressor in starting the war against Egypt.

Before the Qalqilya action, the IDF had already armed itself with a significant quantity of weapons from France. The treaty with the French was being cobbled together, and Dayan and the IDF General Staff were preparing the “Kadesh 1” plan to conquer the Sinai Peninsula. The only missing piece was Great Britain, which had to decide whose side it was on. In the end, it decided to join France and Israel after becoming convinced it might be able to regain control of the Suez Canal, which represented a strategic asset of the highest order for Great Britain. But to understand how it reached this decision, it is necessary to go back a few weeks to early September, when the Israeli French connection started to form.

**Dayan Plans a Campaign**

On September 1, Ben-Gurion attended an IDF General Staff meeting to discuss the doctrine of armored corps deployment. During the meeting, a telegram was delivered from the Israeli attaché in Paris containing information about the British and French intention to seize and occupy the Suez Canal. According to the telegram, the purpose of the operation, code-named Musketeer, was to reverse the nationalization of the canal. The telegram further said that Israel was invited to participate in the campaign on D-day +7.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Immediately after Nasser announced the nationalization of the Suez Canal on July 26, 1956, France and Great Britain began planning a joint military operation against Egypt. Great Britain continued to try diplomatic and political means to resolve the situation, such as a conference of nations that used the canal (without the participation of either Israel or Egypt, which boycotted the conference) and appeals to the U.N. and the Security Council. By contrast, France was interested in military action, but had to endure the British diplomatic efforts: on the military level, France needed Great Britain as a military ally, as the British RAF forces could bomb Egypt from their airbases in Cyprus and because the British had superior/high-capacity bombers; on the political level, France needed to support Great Britain as a fellow member of the U.N. Security Council.[[33]](#footnote-33) And Great Britain, unlike France, was leery of involving Israel in any action.

On September 18, Shimon Peres met with French Defense Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, who shared France’s thoughts about the operation’s feasibility, possible partners, and timing. Before having left for Paris, Peres had consulted with Dayan, who had outlined Israel’s interests in the upcoming action: Israel would prefer that the Suez Canal return to being an international shipping route, but this issue had to be decided entirely by the global powers. Israel was keen on changing the border to control the Straits of Eilat and the outskirts of Sinai (the Nahal/Abu Agela/Rafah line) but could in no way get involved with Great Britain on the Jordanian front while fighting in the south.[[34]](#footnote-34) After Peres’s return to Israel on September 25, Israel received a missive from France inviting a senior delegation to examine a joint French-Israeli operation. That delegation, headed by Foreign Minister Golda Meir, departed on September 29 and included Dayan, Peres, and Transportation Minister Moshe Carmel. The French conference participants at the conference, which became known as the St. Germain Conference, were Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, Defense Minister Bourgès-Maunoury, and senior army officers.

The delegation returned to Israel on October 2 having achieved great success for Israel. Gen. Challe, who had been sent earlier to Israel to see if Israel could assist France and to inspect Israeli bases and IDF conditions in general, submitted an enthusiastic report saying that the IDF was well trained, well equipped, and, in his opinion, capable of fighting the Egyptian army on its own.[[35]](#footnote-35) The French agreed to the Israeli request for military acquisitions, heralding the first stirrings of a joint French-Israeli operation. In fact, after the end of the conference, the French were planning a joint operation with Israel in tandem with planning a joint operation with the U.K.

Israel presented France with its policy principles: should Britain not intervene on behalf of Jordan, Israel would promise not to attack Jordan; the United States would be informed of the move; the Sinai Peninsula would be demilitarized after the war; Israel would control the Straits of Tiran to prevent Egypt from imposing a naval blockade; and Israel would start peace negotiations with the regime that would replace Nasser’s.

The conference revealed disagreements in France’s top security echelon about going it alone with Israel or joining with Britain in Operation Musketeer. The advantages of joining forces with the British were obvious, but it was not at all obvious that the tentative British would actually go through with the act rather than get cold feet and back out. From Israel’s perspective, as Ben-Gurion recorded in his diary, the lack of British participation would be problematic, because France’s own military and political capabilities in the region were limited and might expose Israel to Egyptian reprisals. But the U.K. was not interested in any joint action, at least not overt, with Israel. Whitehall claimed it would damage Britain’s relations with the Arab world enough to outweigh any operational benefit.[[36]](#footnote-36) France and Israel looked for a way to obligate the British to act, each for its own reasons: France needed Britain’s operational capability and Middle East bases and additional diplomatic backing, while Israel wanted to make sure the U.K. would not launch an attack against Israel while it was busy with an operation against Egypt.

During this period from the end of September and through October, at St. Germain and afterwards, Dayan was the unquestioned leader on the Israeli side.[[37]](#footnote-37) He coordinated the military aspect with France but was no less active on the political front. While Ben-Gurion focused on the difficulties and risks, Dayan proposed solutions. He appeared self-confident and assertive even in the authoritative presence of the “old man”: “I told Ben-Gurion he was going overboard with his worries about the risk of being bombed… I might have taken too sharp a tone, but I’m not sorry.”[[38]](#footnote-38) Ben-Gurion let Dayan take the lead and did not stop the continuation of the joint preparations, but Dayan was incapable of solving the central problem involving Great Britain at this point.

So even as the military plan was being prepared by the IDF, the political situation was still up in the air. Israel assumed that only France would participate, and the plan was for the IDF to fight in all of Sinai east of the Suez Canal, defeat the Egyptian army, and seize control of the peninsula. According to the plan, the IDF would be operating alone, although on a schedule coordinated with the French who would be operating on a different front. This made it possible to plan free of political constraints and focus on operational considerations alone.[[39]](#footnote-39)

The Egyptian army consisted of some 100,000 regular and standing men, with a similar number serving in its National Guard. The ground troops included three infantry divisions, an armored division, and a separate Palestinian division. By the start of the campaign, Egypt had integrated some of the newly acquired weapons from the Czech arms deal including 500 armored vehicles, 230 T-34 medium tanks, 100 mobile cannons, 200 APCs, 200 trailed cannon barrels, 200 jet planes (150 MiG-15s and 50 medium II-28s), and 70 cargo planes. In addition, the Egyptian navy received two destroyers and 12 torpedo ships. These weapons dramatically changed the balance of power in Egypt’s favor, but during the Sinai Campaign, the equipment was only beginning to be integrated into the Egyptian military, so that the Egyptians were not yet trained on the equipment or fully proficient in its use. Moreover, the Egyptian army had not yet developed a military doctrine for using these weapons.[[40]](#footnote-40) This situation was one reason for Israel’s decision to fight a preemptive war.

Strategically, the joint French-British threat to the Suez Canal served Israel’s interests. Following its declaration of nationalization and its fears of a French-British action to retake the canal, Egypt moved one division and two armored brigades out of the Sinai Peninsula and redeployed them along the canal. Only one division – the 3rd – remained in Sinai to defend Egypt’s front with Israel, the Palestinian division defending Gaza, and two battalions (one infantry and one motorized) to defend the Gulf of Aqaba and southern Sinai, respectively.[[41]](#footnote-41) In addition to three sector command headquarters in Sinai controlling a few battalions with varying degrees of battle readiness, the Egyptians had other military means at their disposal, such as mortar bombs and cannons. The Egyptian defense plan – prepared by German officers working as consultants to the Egyptians – focused on northern Sinai, where they had built a deep defensive system to prevent Israel from seizing control of vital targets in the Suez Canal zone.[[42]](#footnote-42)

When Dayan returned from the St. Germain conference, he felt the moment of decision was approaching. He therefore initiated the preparation of a plan for an operation called “Kadesh.” Some claim the initiative was aimed at putting pressure on Ben-Gurion to begin a process whose outcome was already known.[[43]](#footnote-43)

In his instructions to the High Command staff, Dayan stressed the following: “The key is speed: we must end the campaign as fast as possible.” He also planned on parachuting forces deep inside enemy territory, one of the ways of achieving speed. Others were landing from the sea, bypassing enemy systems, and breaking through enemy lines on land, all designed to avoid a head-on confrontation.[[44]](#footnote-44) Even at this early stage, Dayan was planning on capturing fortifications near the Suez Canal. The plan was audacious, reflecting the fighting ethos Dayan had built in the army in his years as Chief of Staff. He described the feeling of the senior officers: “The knowledge that it was time to prepare for battle acted like a current of electricity. In terms of their emotions, those present had already entered the campaign with heart and soul… They knew full well the meaning of the get-ready order; nonetheless, not only were they not deterred, they rejoiced at the opportunity to meet the challenge.”[[45]](#footnote-45) The operational instructions were consolidated into a detailed campaign plan overseen by MI Director Meir Amit, which became what was called the “Kadesh” Order. Later, when the last version was finalized and officially published on October 5, 1956, it was renamed “Kadesh 1.”

The “objective” section of the order marked stated that “IDF forces will conquer the northern Sinai, establish a defensive line on the east bank of the Suez Canal, and defend the sphere of the state in the other sectors.”[[46]](#footnote-46) The plans were based on an attack on two axes: the first, an attack on el-Arish by two paratrooper battalions dropped from the air and a third battalion landed by sea in tandem with Laskov’s division breaking through the Rafah sector. For the second axis, Golani’s infantry brigade would capture the forward fortifications and the 27th Armored Brigade would bypass from the south and join up with the paratroopers in el-Arish. The division commanded by Col. Yehuda Wallach, which included the 7th Armored Brigade and two infantry brigades, was placed in the central axis running the length of the Nitzana-Ismailia road. The 7th Brigade was expected to launch an assault near Qusayma and execute a rapid flanking maneuver from the south. This way, the well-fortified grounds of Abu Agela-Um Qatef would be attacked from the west and the east simultaneously. The 9th Mechanized Brigade was to provide a diversion. According to the order, all of these were supposed to occur on “D-day” itself and end the following day, taking place over the course of 48 hours. According to the plan, the armored brigades would, at the next stage, continue moving towards Suez and complete the clearing of the northern half of the peninsula, whereas the paratroopers brigade would land near Sharm al-Sheikh. The order also called for parachuting smaller forces near the Suez Canal to confuse the enemy’s rear and disrupt Egypt’s supply and reinforcement lines into the peninsula. The General Staff assumed that the IDF would complete the occupation of the Sinai Peninsula within four or five days.[[47]](#footnote-47)

The IAF’s major job in the plan would be to help the ground troops, based on the assumption that the French would extend assistance by destroying the main force of the Egyptian air force. The navy was supposed to land troops and defend Israel’s shores, corresponding to its limited capabilities at that time.

In practice, the plan adopted the demand of the armored troop commanders, especially Uri Ben-Ari, to concentrate the armored force, using them as a closed fist to deliver a knockout punch, contrary to Dayan’s opinion that it was preferable to scatter the armored troops and strengthen the less-trained infantry units with tanks.

The “Kadesh 2” plan,[[48]](#footnote-48) prepared by the IDF General Staff based on Dayan’s general instructions and the limitations he imposed, reflected many of the key principles of war that would later become part of the IDF’s doctrine. According to Meir Amit, the Sinai Campaign employed an indirect approach strategy, evidenced by the fact that IDF troops did not attack the Egyptian fortifications but, instead, continued to advance as fast as they could to isolate them, based on the assumption that once cut off, the Egyptians would collapse on their own.[[49]](#footnote-49) Using the armored troops as an independent concentrated steel fist accomplished another principle – speed – imposed due to the constraints of the political schedule and the necessity of toppling the enemy. The Sinai Campaign also showcased the effort to build the reserves, an issue to which Dayan paid a great deal of attention during his term as Chief of Staff. Yet another principle realized was the unprecedented scope of cooperation among the IDF’s services branches (air-sea-land) and corps (armored-engineering-infantry-artillery). And, above all, the campaign used the principles of surprise and deceit. Strategically, the deceit was to create the impression that Israel was about to go to war against Jordan, when it actually intended to fight Egypt. The IDF exploited the tensions in the Jordanian sector to create the setting for an impending IDF attack on the kingdom rather than Sinai. Even the date of “D-day,” was left open to retain the element of surprise; even members of the General Staff were unsure of its exact date.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Just before the campaign, the IDF received more equipment from France. On October 20, it took possession of some 100 upgraded Sherman tanks (the “super-Sherman”), 200 APCs, 300 trucks, 20 tank carriers, and more, such as extraction tanks and land-clearing engineering tanks. Unlike the Egyptian army, the IDF integrated the equipment within days, and many of the new items got their baptism by fire in the Sinai Campaign.[[51]](#footnote-51)

The key goals of the plans were to advance and pose a threat to Egypt at the Suez Canal, and to occupy the northern Sinai. Opening the Straits of Tiran was among the secondary objectives. When setting these priorities, Dayan was taking the global powers into account: as far as they were concerned the IDF’s role was to threaten Egypt at the canal. Dayan’s thinking on this was set before the finalization of the agreements, which took place at the Sèvres conference on October 22. At this point, Dayan forbade a large call-up of reservists so as to preserve the element of surprise.[[52]](#footnote-52)

The “Kadesh 1” battle order was valid less than three weeks, because France, which refused to embark on a military operation without the British, insisted on trying to bring in the U.K. despite the latter’s refusal to be part of a scenario in which it was openly fighting alongside Israel. France invited Israel and Great Britain to another conference reserved for the most senior levels to try to find a solution. On the table was Deputy Chief of Staff Gen. Maurice Challe’s proposal, also known as the “Challe scenario.” At the center of the plan – to which the British agreed on October 16 – was an Israeli attack on the Sinai Peninsula, whereafter the U.K. and France would issue an ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, demanding neither come closer than 10 miles (about 16 kms.) of the Suez Canal so that British and French forces could deploy around it and ensure freedom of shipping. Should Egypt not bow to the ultimatum, the allies would begin an aerial bombardment after 72 hours and activate the plan to invade and seize the canal on the basis of the Musketeer plan, which was already prepared and updated. This way, the U.K. would have a pretext to get involved that avoided the appearance of cooperation with Israel. Rather, it would play the role of the responsible adult entering the region to make order and preserve stability and international trade.

France thought it had found the magic formula, but Ben-Gurion was far from enthusiastic about a proposal in which Israel was to play the role of aggressor. Moreover, in light of the British military support for Jordan and willingness to attack Israel following the Qalqilyia action, Ben-Gurion distrusted their intentions. He worried that the British would realize its proposal to allow the Iraqi army into Jordan and that it could sell out Israel with various political initiatives, such as Operation Alpha, to gain the support of Egypt and the rest of the Arab world.

Despite his reservations, Ben-Gurion could not reject the invitation of Israel’s most important – in fact, only – ally to come to Paris to debate the proposal, while Dayan felt that the possibility that Israel may be helped by France and Great Britain was a golden opportunity. In the discussion he held with Ben-Gurion on the eve of his flight, he said:

We must consider what might happen if we refuse and what [may happen] if we agree [to the British and French request to embark on the campaign on their terms]. If we refuse, we will be missing out on a historic opportunity that will not come again and we will have to continue to go up against Nasser by ourselves, without the French and British armies and without getting French aid in the form of the equipment they’re giving us as part of the joint campaign. Do we have the confidence that we will in fact be able, politically speaking, to begin the campaign by ourselves and seize Sharm al-Sheikh to ensure freedom of shipping to Eilat?[[53]](#footnote-53)

Dayan, then, had no doubt that the IDF would be able to overcome Egypt militarily. For him, the problem was lack of political support.

Dayan, already aware that Ben-Gurion feared an Egyptian bombardment of Israeli cities (Ben-Gurion had been in London during the Blitz, and that experience had left an indelible impression on him), asked Israeli Air Force commander Dan Tolkovlsky to provide Ben-Gurion with data on Israel’s aerial defense needs. The French proposed an original idea: to station French squadrons, so-called “volunteer forces,” to be used only if the Israeli rear were attacked from the air. At this point, Dayan contemplated a solution that would satisfy both the British demand and Ben-Gurion’s concerns: “We’ll execute small-scope ground assaults near the canal that will not necessarily result in an Egyptian aerial response against Israeli cities but will allow Great Britain and France to view them as a cause for intervention.”[[54]](#footnote-54)

Before leaving for France on October 21, Ben-Gurion told Gen. Challe that he had no intention of cooperating with a scenario in which Israel plays the role of the aggressor and the global powers the role of the fair and impartial mediators. Challe, who at this point had no good retort, tried to reassure Ben-Gurion but to no avail. Still, in discussions with his close advisors Peres, Dayan, and Meir just two days earlier, Ben-Gurion was in an optimistic mood, speaking about the campaign as one that would reorganize the whole of the Middle East.[[55]](#footnote-55)

The conference opened on October 22 in a chateau in the elegant Paris suburb of Sèvres.[[56]](#footnote-56) The first meeting was attended by French Prime Minister Guy Mollet, Foreign Minister Christian Pineau, Defense Minister Maurice Bourgès-Maunoury, and their aides. The Israeli side was represented by Ben-Gurion, Dayan, Peres, and their aides. The conversation focused on the upcoming talks with the British, and Ben-Gurion used the opportunity to speak of reshaping the Middle East along the lines Israel preferred. He felt that there was a meeting of interests of the United States, the older global powers of Great Britain and France, and Israel to rid the world of Nasser and redraw the borders of the region to ensure greater stability.[[57]](#footnote-57) Ben-Gurion’s words would mean postponing the operation and politically preparing the ground much more broadly, but the French made it clear that Challe’s plan was the only game in town. Consequently, the sole discussion to be had was one in the context of improving tactical matters, such as how close to the canal Israel would be allowed to go or cutting the time for France and Great Britain to enter the operation after it was begun by Israel, or the scope of French military assistance to Israel. In terms of the timing, France explained, there would be no postponement.

Dayan realized that relations within the French delegation were much more egalitarian than those within the Israeli one. In the French delegation, Mollet was the first among equals, whereas the Israeli delegation was more like “a rabbi and his disciples,” according to Dayan. He saw an enormous gap between Ben-Gurion and the other Israelis, later recounting that, “Our internal consultations are not arguments and decisions, but rather attempts – Shimon Peres’s and my own – to persuade Ben-Gurion to accept our suggestions. And even then, we only do it if they’re of any interest to him, if he hasn’t made the final decision yet himself.”[[58]](#footnote-58)

The French acted as intermediaries between the Israelis and the British delegation, represented by Britain’ Foreign Secretary Selwyn Lloyd and his secretary Donald Logan who arrived later to the villa. Dayan gave a vivid description of the encounter with the British: “Britain’s foreign minister may well have been a friendly man, pleasant, charming, amiable. If so, he showed near-genius in concealing these virtues. His manner could not have been more antagonistic. His whole demeanor expressed distaste—for the place, the company and the topic.”[[59]](#footnote-59) Lloyd was not unaware of the Israelis’ suspicions. In his memoirs, he noted, “It would seem that the Israelis have no reason to trust anything a British minister might have to say.”[[60]](#footnote-60)

At this point, when it seemed the talks were stuck between Israel’s unwillingness to be painted as aggressor, as the plan called for, and Great Britain’s unwillingness to cooperate with Israel in any scenario, Dayan came up with a creative suggestion to bridge the gap and allow both sides to get what they wanted. Mordechai Bar-On, then Director of the Chief of Staff’s bureau and was present at the meeting, described the situation he witnessed and added his interpretation:

Before the participants scattered, Moshe Dayan addressed Ben-Gurion in Hebrew and asked for permission to make a suggestion of his own that might, he thought, help them out of the impasse. Ben-Gurion gave him permission to speak but said he did not necessarily agree. Dayan switched to English and said he wanted to say something that was his idea, and his alone. He suggested that, on D-day/zero hour, Israel would begin an offensive in Sinai with a raid deep inside Egyptian territory that would place the Israeli forces close enough to the Suez Canal for the British and French to claim that shipping was at risk, whereupon they would, as in Challe’s scenario, be able to demand that the sides withdraw their troops. Twenty-four hours later, the Allies would begin bombing the Egyptian bases according to their operational plans.

The major change Dayan was proposing to Challe’s plan was that instead of Israel starting the war with full force, the first stage would involve a limited attack – a raid similar to Israeli reprisals of the preceding two years – although this time it would be deeper and more extensive than before and, most importantly, would [seem to] be endangering shipping through the Suez Canal. While Dayan did want to shorten the time between Israel’s assault and the beginning of the French and British military intervention, compared to Ben-Gurion, who insisted that the allies launch military action simultaneously with Israel, Dayan fundamentally accepted the principle that Israel would start the war by itself and allow the British to play the ultimatum game.[[61]](#footnote-61)

Dayan’s proposal did not solve the problem of Israel playing the aggressor role, but it did solve a different essential issue: Ben-Gurion’s worry that the British would, at the last minute, get cold feet and leave Israel alone in the war. In such a case, Dayan’s plan left room for withdrawal and denial.

On the one hand, under the cover of an action that would look like a reprisal, Dayan would be able to withdraw troops if necessary without real escalation. On the other hand, the idea meant starting the action as “in reverse” by parachuting troops close to the Suez Canal and creating the appearance of an actual threat to Suez Canal shipping, whereupon Great Britain and France would be able to enter the campaign immediately without Israel being left to fight the Egyptian army on its own for an extended period of time.

The idea was both original and creative, based on military force creating a reality that would provide the political pretexts to act, with the military action in itself having no internal military rationale other than providing the political pretexts needed to undertake the campaign. Dayan was thinking about an operation that, for the first 24 hours, would have two simultaneous components: a campaign starting a war against Egypt and its concluding act; that is, a short, limited military action that also served as the opening salvo in a larger military campaign. Dayan’s plan would make it possible for both scenarios to occur at the same time depending on how events developed: the withdrawal of the Israeli force from the canal should Great Britain and France at the last moment decide not to intervene; and the continuation of the Israeli assault to conquer Sinai should the two global powers stick to the plan.

Right after the discussion where Dayan first introduced the idea to the French, it was time for a recess, during which Dayan fleshed out the idea for Ben-Gurion. Two weeks earlier, during the planning of “Kadesh 1,” Dayan had marked several west-to-east passes that were closest to the canal where he intended to parachute small paratrooper units charged with disrupting Egypt’s supply lines and reinforcement routes; one of the passes was known as the Mitla. Dayan wanted to exploit the location of the pass to satisfy the Allies’ demand for an Israeli presence very near the Suez Cana

Should things go badly, he said, he’d be able to rescue the force without trouble. Because the force was a commando unit trained for raids, the Egyptians would think this was a reprisal, not the start of a full-scale war. In consultation with Peres, Dayan presented his plan in detail: a paratrooper battalion would be dropped into the Mitla Pass. At the same two, two other paratrooper battalions would seize a few border fortifications and break into Sinai to join and reinforce the parachuted troop. If necessary, all troops would retreat to the border after joining up. During this time and until the Allies’ started bombing, the IDF troops would remain in a state of waiting on the Egyptian border; the only battles Israel would initiate would be fought in relation to the parachuted troops as they dug into their positions and/or when retreating, as necessary. Thirty-six hours later, the Allies – if they kept their word – would begin an aerial bombardment to destroy the Egyptian air force. Only then would the Israeli army launch an all-out assault.

Great Britain, Lloyd said, would participate only if Israel would fulfill the role spelled out for it in Challe’s scenario, i.e., a carry out a full-scale assault, the English expression being “a real act of war,” and then face Egypt alone for the next 72 hours. The British and French would issue an identical ultimatum to Israel and Egypt, noting retroactively that Israel had committed an act of aggression. Great Britain would not intervene on behalf of Jordan should Jordan attack first, but would intervene should it be attacked by Israel. Also, Lloyd added, Great Britain was still supporting the Iraqi army’s entry into Jordan.[[62]](#footnote-62)

Ben-Gurion was outraged by the British suggestions. His “no” was unequivocal. The sides seemed to have reached an impasse. After a few hours and some more talks with the French, who were very eager to make progress, Ben-Gurion raised Dayan’s idea, adding a new demand: Israel would not be issued an ultimatum, but rather a request not to approach the canal from the east. Israel, he said, had no intention of reaching the canal, and therefore this scenario was in any case meaningless. The British agreed to reduce the gap between Israel’s opening salvo and the global powers’ intervention to 36 hours, but not less than that. Moreover, the British expressed their willingness to turn a blind eye to French pilots manning Israeli squadrons to defend Israel’s airspace.

Dayan, with Ben-Gurion’s blessing, sat in a room off to the side to dictate the details of Israel’s suggestions and conditions, which were ultimately the basis for the agreement signed the next day:

* Israel would not begin a full-scale war, but, instead, would embark on an action should the restriction on freedom of shipping in the Suez Canal be perceived as a real act of war.
* Instead of issuing an ultimatum to Israel, the global powers would issue an “appeal,” with language different from that in the ultimatum issued to Egypt.
* Great Britain and France would join the fighting no later than 36 hours after Israel’s first strike.
* As part of the call to stop its act of war, Egypt would also be asked to stop its acts of aggression against Israel.
* Two French squadrons of Mystère fighter planes with French pilots would be stationed in Israel and two French battleships would be at anchor near Israel’s shores.
* Great Britain would not help Jordan or Iraq should either or both attack Israel. Israel pledged not to attack Jordan.
* Israel’s intention was to annex the territory east of the el-Arish/Sharm al-Sheikh line; France and Great Britain would oppose this annexation.

Lloyd noted Dayan’s plan in his diary and, on the 23rd, left for London to report to the British cabinet. Foreign Minister Pineau, lacking confidence that Lloyd had fully grasped the concept of Dayan’s plan, followed him to London to report directly to British Prime Minister Eden. It would later emerge that Lloyd had indeed failed to fully understand the complexity of Dayan’s “both this and that” plan, and simply reported to the cabinet that Israel was refusing to meet the conditions of starting a full-scale war.

While France and Israel waited for the British response in Sèvres, the former proposed staging an Egyptian bombing that would serve as a pretext for attacking Egypt. Dayan rejected the idea outright. “You can’t stage reality,” he said. “Reasons for attacking Egypt are strewn along the entire border like grains of sand.” Ben-Gurion continued debating the idea; he was clearly torn. While the representatives in Sèvres were still deliberating on how to cooperate, news came that the Egyptian cargo ship *Athos* loaded with weapons destined for the Algerian rebels had just been intercepted off Oran. The French were stunned, and the upshot was strong pressure from the French public to act against Nasser.[[63]](#footnote-63)

Meanwhile, with Pineau still in London, the Israeli leaders used the time for internal consultations. Ben-Gurion presented Dayan with 20 question, about which Dayan would later write, “A weight was lifted from my heart”: based on the type of questions – all relating to “how” – he realized that “if” was no longer in the running. Ben-Gurion had decided in favor of action.[[64]](#footnote-64)

Wanting to add a graphic sketch to his verbal description, Dayan began looking around for a scrap of paper. Peres handed him a pack of cigarettes on which Dayan drew a map of the Sinai Peninsula and the anticipated troop movements. “I was happy we didn’t have a [real] map of Sinai handy: on the white cigarette pack – without the mountains, dunes, and *wadis* – the plan looked not only clear but also simple and easy to execute.”[[65]](#footnote-65) Years later, Peres would say in an interview that he asked both Dayan and Ben-Gurion to sign the packet, which then became an official state document. Every night, Peres recounted, he and Dayan would prepare answers to Ben-Gurion’s list of question.[[66]](#footnote-66) [See map on the cigarette packets, p. --/Appendix No. --.]

Dayan explained to Ben-Gurion that parachuting a paratrooper battalion and having two other paratrooper battalions, accompanied by armored troops, joining up with the first would prevent the British from claiming that this was an insufficient pretext for the intervention the Israelis sought, as decided on in Sèvres. Dayan, with his typical wisecracking, said that on the maps the statesmen were using, where the ratios were much smaller than those of military maps, the paratroopers’ drop would look very close to the canal.[[67]](#footnote-67)

In the meantime, back in London, Pineau had managed to persuade Eden that Dayan’s plan satisfied the British demands. He returned to Sèvres with a document that essentially was Britain’s agreement to Israel’s conditions.[[68]](#footnote-68) It was decided that the action would begin on October 29. Later, the British representatives also arrived back to Sèvres, whereupon the document of understandings was drawn up, in which Israel basically achieved their entire list of demands Dayan had presented to Pineau before the latter left for London. The agreement was signed that evening, October 24, with Ben-Gurion signing for Israel, Christian Pineau for France, and Patrick Dean, the Chairman of the British Intelligence Services Committee, for Great Britain.[[69]](#footnote-69) The telegram Dayan sent to Meir Amit read: “Chances for an imminent war in Sinai are high. Call up Zarro’s units [Meir Zorea’s armored troops]. Make sure the call-up remains secret; immediately, execute a deceit in the direction of Jordan vis-à-vis Iraq’s entrance. We leave tonight, arrive tomorrow morning.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Immediately after returning to Israel, Dayan made the necessary adaptation to the “Kadesh” operation, whose first version became known as “Kadesh 1” and second “Kadesh 2.”

During this time, there were developments on the opponent side as well. On October 25, talks began among the armies of Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, after which they announced the establishment of a joint command and full coordination among them. The Iraqi division again prepared to move. Four days before the Sinai Campaign, Israel seemed to be in a very difficult position – facing a new Arab coalition. Furthermore, Egypt was receiving weapons support from the Soviet Union and Jordan had its British military umbrella. But this situation actually served Dayan’s ruse, because the call-up of IDF troops was perceived as being aimed at the east, where conflict was expected to erupt as the border sector heated up. And it was clear that, for Israel, the entrance of Iraqi troops into Jordan would cross a red line.

The problem Dayan now faced was the secrecy that in which the Sèvres agreements were shrouded, mostly because of the British desire not to reveal its cooperation with Israel. Dayan, obligated by the promise he had given Ben-Gurion to do everything to fulfill Israel’s part in the deal, shared what he knew only with Meir Amit and a few close officers and assistants, including Shlomo Gazit. Dayan gathered all senior IDF officers and, without revealing the essence of the Sèvres agreements, gave them instructions, including the principles for formulating the campaign plan:

* Separate the actions Israel would undertake on behalf of the Allies and those it would undertake for its own ends.
* The army would act alone for 36 hours, in which time as little military action as possible would be taken.
* From the moment of the global powers’ intervention, it was necessary to act quickly, especially with regard to seizing control of the Straits of Tiran.
* At this stage, secrecy was of the essence, and consequently, some of the instructions given would seem bizarre and contrary to military rationale. Therefore, blind obedience was a prerequisite.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Even before the Sèvres conference, Ben-Gurion told Dayan he was very worried about heavy losses in this war. In response, Dayan promised there would be no more than 250 casualties. According to Gazit, who was present at this conversation, the army expected very few losses; this assessment, which Dayan pronounced with assurance, influenced Ben-Gurion’s decision to support a campaign. When they left the meeting, Gazit asked Dayan how he could give such a promise with such certitude, Dayan answered, “If the decision is made to go to war and we win, no one will go back to check and argue about the number of casualties; but if, God forbid, we lose, we will all have much worse things to worry about.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

Despite this statement, Dayan took casualties – the IDF’s and the enemy’s – with utter seriousness, as expressed in the instructions he issued on “defeating enemy forces” but “not destroying enemy forces.” “Best that less blood be spilled,” Dayan said, and therefore formulated his instructions to reflect the goal of “…disrupting the Egyptian forces and making them collapse.”[[73]](#footnote-73)

The new plan, “Kadesh 2,” differed in five major ways from the original “Kadesh 1” plan, all relating to the first stage – those 36 hours in which the IDF was in a state of full-scale war against Egypt disguised as a large reprisal until the Allies’ intervention:[[74]](#footnote-74)

1. The IAF would limit itself to defending the nation’s skies and would not attack Egyptian air force bases.
2. The political constraints meant that the IDF’s best brigade had to be deployed not to conquer el-Arish and Sharm al-Sheikh but rather to satisfy the British pretext for a real act of war. On the other hand, only the paratroopers could jump far behind enemy lines and thus provide the pretext for the campaign in general.
3. Instead of breaking past the enemy lines immediately, engaging in flanking maneuvers deep into the enemy system, and exploiting the speed and surprise to shock and collapse the enemy, the armored troops now had to wait at the starting line for 36 hours.
4. The mission of conquering Israel’s major target, Sharm al-Sheikh, intended to break the blockade on Eilat, was given to a mechanized reserves brigade that was supposed to make its way through the desert. This was far from an optimal scenario, but because the paratroopers brigade had been tasked with a different mission, there was no force left to parachute in or land from the sea.
5. Regarding the French military aid, despite the General Staff’s assessment that the IDF did not need any external assistance whatsoever, Dayan and Ben-Gurion insisted – for political reasons – on accepting military aid directly from France. The French provided six squadrons to defend the nation’s skies as well as warships sailing the Mediterranean near the coast of Gaza to provide artillery assistance. In the end, it emerged that the assistance was, militarily speaking, redundant but politically significant.

The plan Dayan came up with at the Sèvres conference may have helped the partners involved resolve the impasse they had reached. However, its translation into operative terms meant that Israel’s strike force – the armored troops and the Air Force – were on standby for 36 hours, in complete and utter contradiction of the approach Dayan, as Chief of Staff, had instilled in IDF commanders: forward assault, initiative, audacity, and speed. And because he could not share his reasons with the field command ranks, they felt intensely frustrated. This discontent threatened to unravel the fragile plan Dayan had so painstakingly woven together.

**Commanding the Theater**

Dayan’s advancement through the army ranks had certainly been meteoric. Within a mere seven or eight years, he rose from battalion commander to commander of all of Israel’s armed forces, and on October 29, 1956, he even led them into battle, which made him commander of a theater of war. Of the uniqueness of command of a theater, Edward Luttwak wrote:

Because the logic of strategy at the theater level relates military strength to territorial space, we can understand much of it in visual terms, examining forces and their movements in a bird’s eye view, or perhaps one should say in a satellite overview. Of course, strategy has a spatial aspect at every level, but at the tactical level it is the detailed nature of the terrain that matters, while the combat encounters of the operational level could be much the same in any number of different geographical settings. At the theater level, however, some specific territory is the very object of the straggle. It may be as large as a continent or as small as an island; it can be a province, a region, an entire country, or a group of countries; but in any case, a "theater of war" must form a reasonably self-contained space rather than just one part of a larger whole.[[75]](#footnote-75)

Dayan’s theater, the Sinai Peninsula, was notable for some unique features: a desert expanse with many barely passable sections, and mountain ranges with a limited number of passes suited to a military force.

The first stage of the campaign was the call-up, which had to include misdirection and secrecy about Israel’s real intentions. Immediately after the Sèvres conference closed, Dayan told Meir Amit: “Trigger a ruse aimed at Jordan having to do with Iraq’s entrance [into the theater] at once.”[[76]](#footnote-76) Israel’s ground troops depended mainly on the nation’s reservists, so that a call-up of reservists was liable to reveal the army’s offensive intentions. This time, tensions with Jordan over the Qalqilyia action and the news that Iraqi forces were about to cross into Jordan worked in Israel’s favor. The deception aimed for both external and internal consumption, and erroneous reports that the Iraqi army was already in Jordan were leaked intentionally so that the men called up would think they were on their way to fight with Jordan.

The time left until the start of the campaign allowed for minimal training and force deployment opportunities. All efforts were directed at calling up the troops, arming them, and preparing them in a rush. Dayan closely followed the call-up in person.[[77]](#footnote-77) The units got organized at their home bases, and because the country is so small and enjoys the advantage of “interior lines,”[[78]](#footnote-78) the troops could depart for the Egyptian border with just a few hours to spare before the start of the war. There was another helpful external development: these preparations took place while the eyes of the world were focused on an entirely different global crises – the Hungarian uprising against the USSR, which began on October 23. In the United States, President Eisenhower’s attention was on the Hungarian crisis and his reelection campaign that was getting launched at the same time. The British believed that Eisenhower would support a move leading to Nasser’s ouster, an assessment that turned out to be completely wrong.

The second stage of the campaign began with actions that today we would call roaster special operations. On the night of October 28, an Israeli Air Force [Gloster] Meteor NF-13 plane lifted off. Designed for nighttime missions, it was the IAF’s only fully operable plane at the time. It flew over the Mediterranean near the Lebanese Syrian border, thus kicking off Operation *Tarnegol*: (Rooster) the objective – downing the aircraft carrying the Egyptian Chief of Staff and General Staff members back home from Damascus.

A few hours earlier, Israeli intelligence had received word that Abdul Hakim Amar, the Egyptian military commander, accompanied by members of his General Staff, were taking off from Damascus where Israeli intelligence concluded – they had been drawing up joint plans to attack Israel.[[79]](#footnote-79) The mission of shooting down their aircraft, an Ilyushin II-14 cargo plane, unaccompanied by fighter jets, had been given to Yoash Zidon who, together with navigator Elyashiv Brosh, soon identified the plane. The two flew so close to the Ilyushin that they were able to look through the windows and ascertain that all the passengers were indeed military officers. After identification of the plane was absolutely certain, they were given the green light to fire. The Egyptian pilot did not have a chance to report the hit, and the plane plunged into the sea.

Eighteen of Egypt’s most senior officers perished, but not Amar. He had not boarded the plane because he had decided to postpone his own return but sent his officers off with all of his documents. In hindsight, Israel benefitted from Amar’s survival, because it emerged that he was very poorly equipped to run the army; had he perished, he might have been replaced with someone better qualified. But the immediate significance was that Egypt entered the war with half of its senior General Staff officers having died. For 32 years, the Egyptians believed that plane crash was an accident; only after Israel published details of the operation did they learn what really occurred.

After the pilots’ return, Dayan toasted Zidon at IDF headquarters. “When you downed the Egyptian General Staff, you won half the war,” he told him. “Now let’s lift our glasses to [winning] the second half.”[[80]](#footnote-80)

Another component of the second part of the campaign was now defined as an information war. In the 1950s, information was transmitted over telephone lines. On October 29, at 2 p.m., six Mustang fighter planes lifted off from the Air Force base in Ekron. All were equipped with a specially-constructed device consisting of a rope and a weight at its end. The idea was to cut the telephone lines from the Egyptian command centers in Sinai to the army’s headquarters in Cairo, thereby cutting the Egyptian units in Sinai off from their commanders. The assumption was that the Egyptians would immediately switch to using wireless radio communications, which were relatively easy for Israel’s MI to intercept and decode. Egyptian confusion was critical for Dayan’s plan to succeed, especially in the first hours of the action, when the paratroopers were supposed to jump deep into the enemy rear while the other paratrooper units were to breach the Egyptian lines on the ground to join forces with the parachuted men. While the airplanes were en route to their destination, it became clear that the improvised cutting devices were useless, and the pilots resorted to cutting the phone lines with their planes’ propellers. They succeeded in downing almost all communications lines; all planes returned safely to base. As they were flying home, 16 Dakotas – in four waves of four – full of Israeli paratroopers and accompanied by Mystère and Ouragan planes were already headed for the Mitla Pass.[[81]](#footnote-81)

The third stage was the first significant military action, whose entire raison d’être was to serve as a political pretext in accordance with the agreement reached in Sèvres. The force was supposed to land west of the Mitla Pass, but the photography sorties by the Israeli Air Force had revealed a small tent encampment that could have been interpreted as an Egyptian force stationed there. After learning later that it was actually an encampment of a group of Egyptian manual laborers working at the site, a different landing spot was picked; this one was near the Parker Memorial, a few kilometers east of the Mitla. The change was of dramatic significance: it meant that the 890th Battalion was dropped some 60 kilometers east of the Suez Canal, twice the distance planned in “Kadesh 2.” Now, some 30 kilometers and two passes – the Mitla and al-Heitan – separated the actual drop site from the planned one, and both were 16 kilometers from the distance agreed upon at the Sèvres conference. The planned drop site was 30 kilometers from the Suez Canal, in contrast to the 16-kilometer decided on Sèvres. The last-minute change meant that the actual drop was some 60 kilometers from the canal.[[82]](#footnote-82) Dayan relied on the British using low-resolution maps and not being able to pinpoint the actual distance. In hindsight, he turned out to have been right.

The operative meaning of dropping the paratroopers at the new destination was that the men would have to fend for themselves out in the open while waiting for the rest of the 202nd Brigade and their vehicles and backup troops to join them. At this point, the Allies joined the fray. The battalion dug in and received assistance and supplies from the air, including from the French planes stationed in Cyprus. The battalion’s job now was to fortify its position to ensure the provocation; a rapid evacuation was liable to disrupt the entire scheme. Twelve of the 16 Mystères circled the paratroopers two-by-two to provide them with aerial cover. All these steps were taken with utmost care and scrupulous attention not to engage in significant fighting earlier than planned.

On October 29 at 5 p.m., the paratroopers made the jump. After a short 7-kilometer hike, the force struck camp at the Parker Memorial east of the western opening to the al-Heitan Pass. In tandem with the jump of the 890th Battalion, the other units of the 202nd Paratrooper Brigade – reinforced by engineering tanks and smaller field artillery pieces towed by the brigade’s special ops unit – crossed the border to join up with the parachuted men. The trek was long, and en route, the force had no choice but to seize control of an Egyptian camp. On the night between the 30th and 31st, the brigade’s forces – having covered 200 or so kilometers – finally linked up with the men of the 890th, and together they crossed Sinai without any significant Egyptian opposition. For the most part, this stage unfolded according to the original plan.

Simultaneously with the central move – the “pretext move” at the Mitla – the IDF continued to call up and stage its force and operate at other locations to prepare for the large-scale action. The 4th Brigade got its orders and crossed the border for Qusayma to open an additional axis for the parachuted men in case the paratrooper brigade was unable to join up with them. With the major concern that the paratroopers would find themselves tapped in Sinai, the 9th Brigade, under the command of Col. Israel Tal, opened another rescue axis running from Eilat through Kuntila and al-Hamid.

At this point, Cairo began to receive reports from Egyptian patrols on Israeli troops movements in Sinai. That night, The Voice of Israel radio station reported on raids of Fedayeen targets in Quntila and Ras al-Nakav near the border as well as near the Suez Canal. The mention of the canal was critical in providing the Allies with the pretext they wanted. The Egyptians were confused. According to Egyptian journalist Muhammad Hassin Hakel, considered a close confidant of Nasser, the president called him and said, “Something very strange is happening. The Israelis are in Sinai and they seem to be fighting the sands, because they are occupying one empty position after the other!”.”[[83]](#footnote-83)

On October 29, a few hours before the paratroopers’ jump, Nasser sympathizers passed on information to the Egyptian military attaché in Paris that Israel, Great Britain, and France were planning to attack Egypt. Refusing to believe it was true,[[84]](#footnote-84) he and his staff hypothesized that the act might be the start of an all-out Israeli assault, but nothing more than that. Therefore, the Egyptians decided to reinforce their troops in Sinai and sent in two brigades held in reserve: the 2nd Infantry Brigade and the 1st Armored Brigade. The Egyptians intended to use bombers to blow up Israeli Air Force bases, but the Egyptian air force command soon discovered its planes had no fuel. It also became clear that the Egyptian General Staff had suffered a severe blow from the deaths of its 18 senior officers; the skills of the remaining officers, Nasser political appointments, were subpar, and they were consequently having difficulties putting together an effective response. It turned out, then, that Ben-Gurion’s fears had had no basis in reality.

An Egyptian force was dug in at the Mitla Pass to defend the two axes. It was well camouflaged in the nooks and crannies of the terrain and therefore had not been discovered by IAF overhead patrols. The Egyptians were now 6 kilometers as the crow flies from the paratroopers’ positions east of the pass.

Until this point, events had unfolded more or less according to plan, but from here on events began to go wrong. Although the Sinai Peninsula is a desert, its topography limits free movement. Large zones are impassable to vehicles because they consist of dunes, mountains, and *wadis*. The war in Sinai was fought over control of the passable routes by means of which it was possible to control the whole peninsula. Israel’s war plan focused on breaking through two axes in the northern Sinai after the brigade combat troops joined the parachuted men near the Mitla Pass through a third axis located farther south: Quntila-Bir Hamid-Kalat al-Nahal.

According to “Kadesh 2,” after the Allies’ intervention, 36 hours after zero hour, the 77th Task Division would enter via the northernmost axis, Rafah-el-Arish-Qantra The 38th Division, the IDF’s largest and strongest division, which included the 7th Brigade, the army’s only armored brigade, was tasked with seizing control of the central and most convenient axis in Sinai, between Nitsana and Ismailia. Controlling this spot would split the Sinai in two. The division’s target was to seize control also of secondary routes going through Qusayma and Abu Agela that allowed passage through two routes, one to Bir Gafgafa and the other to Bir Hasana. The Egyptian, well aware of the importance of these axes, had therefore created a tight network of fortifications in the area: Abu Agela/Um Sihan/Um Qatef/Qusayma constituted a difficult-to-breach network of Egyptian fortifications defended by 6,000 soldiers.

Thus, the Sinai theater was divided into two sectors:

* The central sector, in the southern part of the theater, where the 38th Division commanded by Col. Yehuda Wallach was located. Col. Assaf Simhoni, the Commander of the Southern Command, was the direct commander of the sector. Simhoni often bypassed the division commander to work directly with the brigade commanders.
* The northern sector, the site of the 77th Division commanded by Maj. Gen. Haim Laskov, with the General Staff the sector’s direct commander.

The Chief of Staff also directly commanded the 9th Brigade, whose function was to move through the southernmost route from Eilat to Sharm a-Sheikh, and the 202nd Paratrooper Brigade, which had been split into the parachuted force and the force that was to link up with it overland. This disorganized command structure triggered command and control difficulties.

The 7th Armored Brigade was commanded by Col. Uri Ben-Ari, who had already proven capable of executing a lightning maneuver with his armored force. At this point, many IDF commanders, Dayan included, doubted the ability of a concentrated armored force to quickly advance through Sinai. The Pelet drill, held in May 1956 to examine the abilities of the Israeli armor, ended with disturbing results, with 13 AMX tanks and one Sherman tank malfunctioning. Soon thereafter, another 27 AMXs broke down.[[85]](#footnote-85) Nonetheless, Dayan allowed the 7th Brigade to operate like an armored fist and serve as the division’s main assault force.

Col. Simhoni, a skilled, dynamic commander who was well-liked by Ben-Gurion, was now facing a difficult dilemma. Because Dayan had not entrusted him with the secret of the political agreements and had not explained to him the rationale of the Sèvres, he could not fathom why he should wait with his troops on the other side of the Egyptian border. As Dayan had anticipated, it seemed to Simhoni that the campaign was being conducted bizarrely, irrationally even. Israel had dropped a force deep in the Sinai and sent another force across the border, which made Simhoni sure the Egyptians would respond with full force. Simhoni thought it was time to act, because pace and speed are critical in operations such as this one. Moreover, it did not look to him as if the Israeli Air Force was about to undertake an operation to paralyze the Egyptian air force, which at that moment was free to attack Israeli force concentrations. “The General Staff’s gone crazy,” he told his subordinates.[[86]](#footnote-86) Therefore, he ignored Dayan’s explicit orders to the General Staff demanding blind obedience even if the orders seemed irrational.[[87]](#footnote-87)

There was also a personal aspect: Simhoni was embittered by Dayan’s attitude to him and because his appointment to command the Southern Command had not come with a promotion to major-general as befitted the job (Simhoni was a colonel). On the other hand, Simhoni’s closeness with Ben-Gurion gave him confidence in case of a run-in with Dayan. During the war, Simhoni’s criticism and anger towards Dayan mounted; on one occasion, he went so far as to say, “Dayan has got to go… Ben-Gurion promised me I’d be appointed Chief of Staff.”[[88]](#footnote-88)

The Prussian military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz spoke about the rules of military grammar, the internal set of rules that guides military moves and is liable to clash with the political rationale it serves. That was the situation in the Southern Command before October 29. Simhoni probably had some awareness of the political constraints of the day, but found it difficult to accept their ramifications for military planning.[[89]](#footnote-89) Being sure that waiting would allow the enemy to be proactive, he ordered Wallach, commander of the 38th Division, and Ben-Ari, commander of the 7th Brigade, to prepare the troops for immediate entry to Sinai. His justification for the move was “intelligence reports” – completely fictional – regarding Egyptian troop movements from west of Abu Agela.[[90]](#footnote-90)

This decision would remain the heart of a deeply visceral, years-long fight between supporters of Dayan and Simhoni loyalists.[[91]](#footnote-91) In Simhoni’s defense was the claim that he operated in a gray area, that he applied a senior commander’s scrutiny and deliberation on the ground exactly as Dayan would have expected of him, and, most importantly, that he made a point of reporting the entry of the 7th Brigade to the Sinai zone to the outpost of the Supreme Command, thinking that if the move was problematic, the Superior Command would instruct him to stop. But the answer he got made him think he had its authority to proceed.[[92]](#footnote-92) One may thus assume that, in the fog of war, the people in the Command did not fully comprehend the meaning of the move and that whatever else happened, Dayan did not receive an update from the Supreme Command about the move. On the other hand, Simhoni thought that he was doing what he was obligated to do as commander and therefore the assertions against him were unfounded and overstated.

On the night of October 29, the 4th Brigade attacked Qusayma to create an opening in the Egyptian network of fortifications at Um Qatef that would allow a rapid incursion into Sinai. Delays and a certain amount of confusion led to Simhoni’s decision to move the 7th Brigade into Sinai. On the morning of October 30, the Qusayma complex was conquered. At this point, Simhoni and Ben-Ari decided to exploit the success and send the 7th deep into the west using a route bypassing the Um Qatef fortifications on the south, a move that would allow the brigade to reach the central axis crossing Sinai and leading to Ismailia. Being deep inside Egyptian territory, the 7th Brigade exchanged fire with the Egyptians at Um Qatef. Ben-Ari decided not to try to enter the fortified compound, a step that would have risked a difficult fight, but rather to go around it and forge ahead with his tanks.

Dayan left the Supreme Command outpost early in the campaign and, as was his wont, went to observe on-the-ground events in person. In the morning of the 30th, he received word about the advance of the 7th Brigade. Although he was seething with rage that the brigade had entered deep into Egyptian territory, he understood there was no point in trying to change the move now; at this point, he had no choice but to try to exploit the brigade’s military successes and hope they wouldn’t damage the political plan. This decision is evidence of Dayan’s flexible nature: he was always attentive to changing reality and new opportunities. He wasn’t wedded to any plan, not even his own. Dayan, then, forged ahead to the front, reaching Simhoni at noon. There, according to various testimonies, he dressed Simhoni down for ignoring his orders.[[93]](#footnote-93) In his *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, he wrote:

Yesterday, I brutally clashed with the Commander of the Southern Command who against the General Staff order activated the 7th Armored Brigade before the designated time… Despite the explicit instructions,…despite the explanations of the reasons for the order, the Southern Command Commander clung to his opinion that there was not a moment to lose and, immediately as the action began, it was necessary to seize the initiative, the element of surprise, to the extent possible. He therefore decided to deploy all the forces at his disposal already on D-day…He views the General Staff instructions on the matter as a political and military blunder that we are destined to pay for dearly in the future…As for the Commander’s explanations of the motives that made him instruct [his men] in contravention of his order: I heard about them en route. And what I had to say to him I already had a chance to say before we met with the brigade commander [Uri Ben-Ari]. I did not have a shadow of a doubt about the order now required, and I already saw in my mind’s eye all the tanks turning around and returning to the staging area in Nahal Ruth as they had come. In terms of order and discipline, there is no doubt that this must be the order issued, but is it the right order in terms of the conduct of the campaign?[[94]](#footnote-94)

Simhoni’s move had placed Dayan in a quandary: to stop the brigade and even have it go back for the sake of sticking to the plan and his promise to Ben-Gurion, or to exploit the military success the brigade had attained to continue the momentum? Dayan chose the latter:

What’s done cannot be undone. If the progress of the armored brigade into Sinai does in fact cause an increased Egyptian action (especially aerial) before the time we set, we cannot prevent it now, and it is therefore better to generate the maximal benefit possible from the armored brigade’s entrance into the campaign. The 7th Brigade must immediately engage in the task with which it was charged in the “Kadesh” order.[[95]](#footnote-95)

Dayan met in person with Ben-Ari and briefed him himself, cutting Simhoni – Ben-Ari’s direct commander – out of the loop. Bar-On had this to say about it:

There must be no unnecessary blood-letting; either way, the work tomorrow will be easier [with the Allies’ entry into the fray]. The brigade should advance westwards and penetrate everywhere it is easy to do so and without heavy losses. Everywhere the brigade encounters opposition, it must stop and direct the rest of the troops to new routes. Using this method of casting about and putting out feelers, penetrating through the cracks will – until the intervention of the Allies at Suez – be the brigade’s core of operation. Firefights must be postponed to a later day; for now, the forces must flow like a stream finding its way through many channels and choosing the most convenient passes for its waters to flow.[[96]](#footnote-96)

This was not the first time Dayan was accused of skipping over the chain of command. But this move may be viewed in several ways. Military doctrine distinguishes between two situations: skipping the ranks and shortening the chain of command. The case of skipping the chain of command refers to a commander who issues binding orders directly to a commander who is further down the chain of command, i.e., a rank two or more lower than the individual issuing the order. This is an undesirable phenomenon; bypassing ranks is detrimental and forbidden, because it violates the principle of unity of command. In contrast, when the chain of command is shortened, there is no violation of the unity of command and therefore it is permitted under special circumstances. One is when the command and control mechanisms are unable to fully function for a while because they are relocating to a new position. Another is when an opportunity that should be exploited arises or it is necessary provide a response to a risk that the commander assesses to be of seminal importance in attaining the goals of the campaign, and this is the only way to exploit the opportunity or provide a response to the risk. According to military doctrine, shortening the chain of command is permitted only temporarily and only for the period of time necessary. In this case, where Dayan viewed intervention necessary because of a fundamental change to the plan, and given the rapid rate of operations and movement, it is certainly arguable that he operated in accordance with the rules of shortening the chain of command.[[97]](#footnote-97)

Dayan’s words reflected the indirect approach, which in the 1980s was labeled by the U.S. Army as the maneuvering approach. This approach is based on deep penetration and avoidance of areas where the enemy is strong and depends on rapid movement that also destabilizes the enemy. The starting point of the maneuvering approach is not the question of how to find the enemy’s concentration of strength, but rather the opposite: to stay far from the enemy’s points of strength and then use superiority against the enemy’s points of weakness. Success depends on a combination of surprise and lightening-speed execution so that the weakness is attacked before it manages to respond.[[98]](#footnote-98)

Despite Dayan’s anger at Simhoni and Ben-Ari, he knew that their conduct was a direct result of the military lessons and culture he had himself instilled in the IDF. The supreme command was initiative and aggression, leading Dayan to conclude, “Despite all my displeasure both at the violation of discipline and at the deployment of the 7th Brigade ahead of time and without a suitable plan, I could not deny the sympathy I felt for the armored brigade going into action before permission was granted.” In his diary, he wrote the sentence that would become the IDF’s motto for decades: “better to be engaged in restraining the noble stallion than in prodding the reluctant mule.”[[99]](#footnote-99)

On the night between October 30 and 31, Ben-Ari – heeding Dayan’s instructions to bypass hurdles – moved his brigade through the al-Deja Pass, which allowed him to encircle Um Qatef northwards and reach the western road to Ismailia and the Suez Canal.[[100]](#footnote-100) After the brigade completed the move of encircling Um Qatef without attacking it, it prepared to ambush the Egyptian 1st Armored Brigade, a General Staff reserve force of 110 tanks sent – according to intelligence reports – to Sinai to stop the IDF’s progress. Even before making contact with the advancing 7th, the 1st came across the brigade’s forward units, forcing the Egyptian to retreat from a dogged fight. On November 2, the first tanks of the 7th were stopped some 16 kilometers from the canal, exactly as the agreement with the Allies had stipulated. Because of the rapid progress, there were many problems of identification; as a result, the brigade suffered heavy losses in a two-way exchange of fire with the Israeli Air Force.

The troops of Avraham Eden, commander of the 82nd Battalion of the 7th Brigade, completed the encirclement of Um Qatef from the west, but the attempt to conquer the fortification from the east failed. The reasons were contradictory orders and confusion in the chain of command: both Dayan and Simhoni skipped over Wallach, the division commander, and issued conflicting orders. Furthermore, the 10th Brigade, which Dayan had ordered to take Um Qatef on the night between October 30 and 31, was an ill-prepared brigade made up from reservists. Its commander, Shmuel Guder, made several major blunders in planning and conducting the battle.[[101]](#footnote-101) The outcome was a hesitant, indecisive strike, after which Guder gave Dayan, who had stopped in for a visit, a long list of excuses. Dayan was convinced that Um Qatef had to be conquered to open a supply axis for the paratroopers and allow passage for the 7th Brigade. In contrast, Wallach felt that the compound was encircled and would collapse into itself. Dayan refused to listen.

As dark fell, the 10th Brigade attack began, but because of confusing orders from the Southern Command and the Supreme Command outpost, and because of mistakes in navigating the troops in the unfamiliar terrain, the assault went nowhere. A few hours later, when Dayan heard that the attack had yet to get under way, he passed a message along to Guder that unless he carried out the mission, he would be dismissed. By morning, it was clear the assault had failed. The brigade’s battalions, after getting lost and realizing they were fighting peripheral compounds, retreated at dawn. An enraged Dayan dismissed Guder.

On the night of October 31, Dayan brought the 37th Brigade into the fight. This was supposedly an armored brigade, but in practice, the brigade was in its initial stages of being renewed and rebuilt, and was not ready to fight. The brigade had three Sherman tank battalions and a battalion of French AMX-13 tanks. But the brigade’s skills were far from the level needed to operate armor, and, in general, its battle-readiness was low. Dayan wanted to deploy the brigade to assist the 10th Brigade. At an early stage, he had been impressed by the success of the 7th Brigade, and he now felt that the key to success in the desert was the tanks. Intelligence reports on the advance of the 1st Armored Division reinforced his decision, and thus the 37th Brigade was cast into the fray. If the 10th Brigade had suffered from long, hesitant battle conduct, knowledge gaps, and contradictions between the General Staff and the command, the 37th Brigade was inserted too quickly into battle, and its commander, Shmuel Glinka, was far too eager to fight.[[102]](#footnote-102) From the entire brigade, only four battalions actually went to Sinai. Because the tank battalions were late in arriving, the assault was ultimately carried out by two APC battalions alone. The attack was stopped by heavy Egyptian fire and the troops retreated. The losses were heavy: 20 dead and 65 wounded, including Glinka, who was evacuated to the hospital and later died of his wounds.

Dayan assumed responsibility for the flawed assault, writing, “This mistake happened at the ranks above the fighting units. The disintegrating fighting – the command, the General Staff, and the Chief of Staff (I) are responsible for that.”[[103]](#footnote-103) In his judgment, the reasons for failure were the pressure he had exerted on the command to develop the axis and the command’s mistaken assessment that the Egyptian resistance in Um Qatef was crumbling. Furthermore, there were significant command and control problems on the part of the forward command and the Supreme Command outpost, as well as errors in understanding where the forces were located arising from the forces’ confused reports.[[104]](#footnote-104)

On the battlefield, the will of both sides is tested, and the question is who will break first. The one who delays his breaking point wins. And, indeed, despite the 10th Brigade’s local blunders and the 37th Brigade’s failures at Um Qatef, by November 1, the Egyptians, having withstood poundings from the ground and air, were utterly spent in their fortified compound. At 5 p.m., the defenders were ordered to retreat because the Egyptian command had decided to concentrate its force on defending Egypt proper. Furthermore, the Egyptians had exhausted their supply and ammunition capabilities. The retreat, which began in an orderly fashion, turned into frightened melee and most of the Egyptian force fell into Israeli captivity.[[105]](#footnote-105) The battle for Um Qatef was over, and Dayan – very unhappy with the Israeli force’s hesitancy and unwieldiness – laconically remarked, “The Egyptians fought well while we fought badly.”[[106]](#footnote-106) He aimed the bulk of his criticism at the Egyptian defensive concept demonstrated at Um Qatef:

I don’t know if the doctrine the Egyptians adopted is something they got from their British or German or Russian teachers. Whatever the case, according to the Egyptian General Staff approach, the Abu Agela compound was supposed to have served as a barrier to an assault on Sinai in the central sector of Qusayma-Nitsana. The Egyptian command decided that this defense, built on six major forts – Qusayman, Um Qatef, Um Sihan, Abu Agela, Sakhar Ruefa, and Ras Matamor – held by an infantry brigade with assisting elements – must stop an Israeli attempt to break through and destroy any enemy unit that managed to penetrate… I found three major flaws with this method.[[107]](#footnote-107)

Dayan added that the power of these forts to stop troops in the Sinai Desert was inadequate, noting that these were not the type of huge European fortifications that make it possible to contain the length and breadth of entire regions.[[108]](#footnote-108) The problem, then, lay in the quantity of means invested and the topographical differences. From Dayan’s perspective, Egypt’s major failing was its concept of static warfare. His critique of Egypt’s passive fighting is understandable; of greater interest is the comparison he drew between Europe and Sinai, just as he had done in his battalion commanders’ course, when he was requested to plan his defense against Egyptian invasion into Israel. Dayan again stressed the unique context and the fact that it is simply not possible to copy a certain model from one place to another.

On October 31, in the morning, Israel received a message saying the Allies’ entry would be delayed. Ben-Gurion’s deep-seated worries about an Allied betraying now seemed justified. It was only later that Israel realized the delay was due to operational circumstances: the Allies militaries needed a longer staging time than planned because the schedule dictated to them by the political echelon had not taken into consideration the pace of military organization.

Dayan learned the details of what went wrong in the fight, later named the Battle for the Mitla Pass, when he returned to the command center in Ramle, having already heard highlights over the wireless. Because of the change of the parachute drop site, the force was deployed over low hills, exposed to the passes, and too close to the Parker Memorial. Battalion commander Ariel Sharon, who received intelligence reports about a large Egyptian force approaching the area, asked for permission to advance toward the passes to seek shelter that would allow his forces to organize themselves before the enemy’s arrival. According to the intelligence, the passes were supposed to be empty. The General Staff barred Sharon from advancing, but it was not in Sharon’s character to sit and wait. Sharon was unaware that his elite brigade did not actually have any operative function other than providing the excuse for a war by its mere presence in that place and that they had already fulfilled that role. On the morning of October 31, Head of Central Command Rehavam Zeevi (Gandhi) was sent to observe the situation. Zeevi forbade Sharon to go into the pass with his whole force but permitted him to send a patrol. Sharon sent a large patrol to see if it would be possible to seize and hold the passages and allow the rest of the brigade to deploy in them. What Sharon did not know was that five infantry companies from the Egyptian 2nd Brigade were already deployed on either side of the pass armed with 57 mm anti-tank cannons and recoilless cannons presenting a deadly ambush for any force entering the pass. Sharon, who was waiting for Dayan to show up, stayed behind, and in his stead, the force was led by Deputy Brigade Commander Yitzhak (Haka) Hofi. The force that entered the pass at noon was trapped by crossfire, and Sharon was forced to send further troops as backup until the Egyptian force was bested. A fierce hand-to-hand fight ensued from crevice to crevice, similar to the battles the U.S. Marines had fought with the Japanese at Iwo Jima. After a few hours, the paratroopers managed to overcome the Egyptians, leaving behind 260 enemy dead, but at the cost of 38 dead and 120 wounded IDF men. It was a heroic fight, replete with outstanding acts of courage and sacrifice, becoming part of the IDF legend of heroism, comradeship, and determination. Tactically, the battle served as inspiration for generations of commanders. However, strategically and operationally, it was meaningless. The High Command’s frustration and rage at Arik Sharon were profound.[[109]](#footnote-109)

Dayan summarized his evaluation of what had happened with the paratroopers: “Some on the General Staff were furious with me, saying I’m forgiving and lenient with the paratroopers… There is no need to say how sorry we are.” Dayan stressed the need for a commander to deviate from an instruction for a local tactical reason that only he could appreciate on the spot, which was how Dayan had operated during the War of Independence. On the other hand, he drew a critical distinction between errors and violations of orders. Dayan added that he was angry because he had not been able to make them submit an honest report or create a situation of full trust between them. It was fairly obvious that he meant Sharon, even if he didn’t mention him by name. At this point, Dayan repeated the principle he had formulated in response to Simhoni and Ben-Ari, according to which he preferred noble stallions: “The truth is that I view cases in which units do not fulfill their combat mission as a serious problem in the army rather than the cases in which units exceed their remit and act beyond whatever they were tasked with.”[[110]](#footnote-110)

In this way, Dayan shaped the military culture of the IDF for generations of commanders to come: its core –initiative and action, even if these sometimes take a steep toll. In the end, Dayan dismissed only one commander during and after the campaign, that of the 10th Brigade, and not for lack of discipline stemming from too much initiative but for the opposite – lack of initiative and resolve.

In the evening of the third day of the war, the Allies finally began the aerial bombardment Israel had been waiting for, and there was no longer any reason to hold back. Dayan gave the order to deploy all the forces as spelled out in “Kadesh 2.” Simhoni had direct command of the 38th Division (the 10th Brigade and 38th Brigade assault failed and only the next day, on November 1, did the Egyptians get their order to retreat, ending the battle to breach the sector). The campaign in the central sector was decided, and Dayan left for the northern sector where the campaign was starting, joining the 27th Brigade commanded by Haim Bar-Lev under Haim Laskov’s 77th Division. The goal: the conquest of Rafah and el-Arish.

As Dayan entered el-Arish on November 2, a barrage of fire whizzed past his head, killing a soldier standing nearby. By noon, Dayan received the report by the lead IDF force that el-Arish was captured. Dayan, worried about the political pressure on the U.K. and France, scheduled to begin their ground offensive only on November 5, urged the troops to complete the conquest of Sinai, especially Sharm al-Sheikh to allow for the opening of the Straits of Tiran. As always, he toured the units to learn firsthand about the situation on the ground. While driving around, indifferent to the danger, he passed columns of retreating Egyptian army units whose soldiers were still armed with their personal weapons. Dayan later wrote: “There was nothing stopping a group of men from taking cover and turning us into sieves with their machineguns.”[[111]](#footnote-111) However, the defeated Egyptian – exhausted and thirsty – did not recognize the Israeli leader and showed no interest in him. This would change dramatically by the end of the campaign when the black eyepatch became Dayan’s internationally recognized trademark.

Because the 9th Brigade had not been able to take Sharm al-Sheikh, Dayan, competing against the diplomatic clock, directed the paratrooper force there. By the time the paratroopers arrived, the 9th Brigade had managed to capture the fortifications around Sharm al-Sheikh. This marked the end of the IDF’s job: it now controlled half of the Sinai Peninsula, although its forces were stopped about 15 kilometers from the Suez Canal, as decided on in Sèvres. On November 5, the Sinai Campaign concluded after a mere eight days. Israel’s losses: 172 dead, 817 wounded, and three MIAs (missing in action). The war’s military objectives were fully achieved. The victory was stunning.

Dayan conducted a closing ceremony with the General Staff in Sharm al-Sheikh together with the 9th Brigade. He did not inform Simhoni of the ceremony in time, and Simhoni was forced to find a light plane that would fly him to the ceremony so that he wouldn’t miss it. Returning from the ceremony, the plane crashed; Simhoni and the flight crew – Lt. Col. Asher Dromi and supervising pilot Binyamin Gordon – were all killed. Dayan allowed himself to be more generous about Simhoni in death than in life, writing, “There is a note of fateful tragedy to this death of the CO of the Southern Command after the end of the war rather than in battle.”[[112]](#footnote-112) In the Chief of Staff’s order of the day, Dayan wrote, “With the fall of Assaf, the Israel Defense Force lost a great commander, a commander who in his 34 years of life did not miss a single campaign of his people’s wars. A soldier who was in his spirit, his body, and his body a courageous, intelligent field battle commander.”

At the closing ceremony, Dayan read Ben-Gurion’s letter to the fighters: “You have brought the biggest and most glorious operation in the annals of our nation to a successful conclusion.” Ben-Gurion, swept up by the general euphoria, decreed the “establishment of the third Israelite kingdom.” Although the war was over, Dayan was left with one more battle to fight: after meeting Ben-Gurion in Jerusalem, he was returning to Tel Aviv when his vehicle was caught in a Fedayeen ambush. Dayan and his small entourage jumped out of the car and sought cover. Dayan proposed an assault on the shooters, but Mordechai Bar-On, his bureau chief, stopped him. Reinforcements appeared on the scene within minutes.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Now that the political part of the campaign had begun, Dayan hoped Israel would at least get to control Sharm al-Sheikh, Gaza, and a strip of land connecting the two. He proposed to Ben-Gurion to begin paving a road from Eilat to Sharm al-Sheikh, and Ben-Gurion approved. But to Dayan’s disappointment, Ben-Gurion had to backtrack because of heavy international pressure coming, including from the United States – pressure that involved the threat of sanctions. Israel’s major achievement was the acceptance of its demand that U.N. forces be deployed in the Sinai Peninsula to serve as a buffer between Israel and Egypt.

The IDF withdrawal, which began in December after the British and French troops had left, was effected in stages. Dayan ordered all usable Egyptian equipment transported to Israel and whatever was left behind to be destroyed. In the meantime, he was in contact with Canadian Lt. Col. Eedson Louis Millard “Tommy” Burns, the chief of the U.N. observer staff in Israel. As usual, Dayan developed friendly relations with the foreigner. Thinking that in the future the IDF would again fight in this terrain, Dayan instructed all units to free their officers to tour the region and get to know it, just as he was spending time traveling around it. Of course, one motivation for these tours was to indulge in his hobby of searching for archeological artefacts.

Ben-Gurion, under pressure from the Allies, was forced to return all of Sinai. On January 15, 1957, Israel returned el-Arish at a formal ceremony. A resentful Dayan, who attended the event, told a journalist why he was there: “IDF commanders must taste all the dishes, the bitter as well as the sweet.”[[114]](#footnote-114) The United States would not concede and continue to press Israel to complete a full withdrawal from all the territories it had taken or face sanctions. Dayan led a combative line, deeming it wrong to give in without a fight for control of Gaza and Sharm al-Sheikh, even at the cost of sanctions. At this point, Dayan’s and Ben-Gurion’s positions were diametrically opposed – a classic clash between the military man’s narrower point of view and the statesman’s broader perspective. Ben-Gurion made it clear to Dayan that control of Gaza did not necessarily represent any great benefits. Dayan would adopt the identical position as his own years later, on the eve of the Six-Day War. On March 8, after dragging its feet as long as possible, Israel completed its Sinai withdrawal, having controlled it for five months. When Dayan was asked why, given his disagreements with Ben-Gurion, he had not resigned, he answered: “I would take a very dim view of a Chief of Staff who’d throw his weight around to affect a government decision… Anyone who accepts the role of soldier, including the Chief of Staff, must accepts the government’s security policy.”[[115]](#footnote-115)

This was, of course, Dayan playing the innocent. In a similar situation, when serving under Moshe Sharett, Dayan did tender his resignation. The truth lay not in the job or the rank but in the person. Dayan was deeply in awe of Ben-Gurion.

Dayan would not stay in his position for long. His retirement was imminent.

**Evaluating Dayan as a Theater and Campaign Commander**

Dayan chose to command the Sinai Campaign in his own unique way that reflected his personality, for better and for worse. In this, too, as in many other aspects of his life, he provoked heated debate and conflicting charges. In the army, opinions about Dayan varied: some were awed by his unique military leadership skills, while others harshly criticized his conduct as commander. He was censured for not issuing clear instructions; consequently the 7th Brigade was sent into the battle without authorization. He was also blamed for the losses at Um Qatef, and the ill-advised deployment of the 10th and 37th Brigades. The fact that Dayan was unavailable at key decision-making moments was partly responsible for these failures.

Dayan’s overall tendency remained as it had always been – to be as close as possible to the point of engagement. He did not invent a new method of command; it is common military doctrine that when a commander is not in the command post, a substitute designated by the commander is authorized to act in his stead. This second-in-command handles the routine management of a campaign, implementing the commander’s orders as given; only the commander may change them through his substitute. This arrangement is designed “for situations in which the commander leaves the command post…to issue commands closer to the front, tour the area, conduct meetings, etc., but the commander continues to function properly and his absence from the command center does not affect his functioning; on the contrary, his absence ensures and strengthens it.”[[116]](#footnote-116)

Dayan availed himself of this practice to the extreme. He was aware of the problematic situation his extended absence created at the command post, and felt he had to justify himself:

I am considering joining the units attacking Rafah until the conquest of el-Arish is concluded. For the first two days of the campaign, its routine management will be placed in the trustworthy hands of staff officers (General Staff Branch) who have outstanding knowledge and judgment. I spent most of the first two days of the campaign in the field. In the evening, I returned to the command post, and remained in constant radio communication with headquarters; the staff officers say this isn’t enough and that my absence from the staff disrupts the proper operations of work. They may be right, but I am incapable – or unwilling – to behave otherwise.[[117]](#footnote-117)

On another occasion, Dayan expressed his romantic longing “for the good old days of simple wars. When the time of war approached, the commander would mount his white steed and the trumpeter would sound the call to charge the enemy.”[[118]](#footnote-118)

Shlomo Gazit, who was by Dayan’s side, described his conduct on the battlefield:

I spent the four days of fighting closely following the campaign while in constant contact with the French representatives who were with us in the command post, keeping them up-to-date on the situation at the front. We did not see the Chief of Staff for those 96 hours. Dayan scurried from one force to another in the Sinai, while Meir Amit, the head of the General Staff Branch, stayed behind and ran the Central Command post and the war. Dayan behaved this way primarily because of his personality, and I am certain that he did not much care about military doctrinal protocol on the Chief of Staff’s appropriate location during fighting.[[119]](#footnote-119)

Rehavam Ze’evi, the chief of staff officer of the Southern Command, would later describe Dayan’s habit of conferring far-reaching authority on staff officers and the head of the Operations Division left behind in the Central Command post:

Other than Moshe Dayan, I know no other Chief of Staff who would have allowed his deputy or the head of the Operations Division as much freedom of action as Meir Amit was given, for good and for bad, during the Sinai Campaign. Moshe got up and went down to the front and didn’t come back for the next 72 hours until the battle was over. I was with him, as the chief staff officer of the Southern Command, until the conquest of el-Arish, and we didn’t have the faintest idea of what was happening at the General Staff. Back then, we used a single-side modulation device to communicate, and we knew nothing about the political front – what was going on with the French and the British, or what Ben-Gurion wanted. Now, in retrospect, when I ask myself how Dayan could have left the IDF main Command post in Ramleh in Meir’s hands for him to do all the work, I have come to the conclusion that there was both good and bad in his conduct. No staff officer likes having the commander breathing down his neck, but every once in a while, every staff officer wants to receive confirmation that he isn’t straying from the commander’s intentions and “getting off-track.” We stayed with Dayan for 48 hours…Dayan moved as far ahead as he could, mostly out of curiosity – to see, have a say, get unscreened and unprocessed reports. He also knew that this projected confidence to the troops. Soldiers in the tanks and half-tracks driving past would stop and applaud him. It was impossible to keep him out of sight, which was something he didn’t want in any case.[[120]](#footnote-120)

Meir Amit, the head of the General Staff Branch, who had to bear much of the day-to-day command responsibility and who had earned Moshe Dayan’s full trust and backing, complained that Dayan was always running around in the field and was generally unavailable. “No matter how much you plan, prepare, and coordinate ahead of time, the circumstances that develop on the ground dictate a different reality.” Nevertheless, he also noted that “Dayan’s spirit hovered over the ground.”[[121]](#footnote-121)

Indeed, the General Amit in the headquarter made several important – although not, it is worth noting, critical – decisions on its own because Dayan was incommunicado. In his memoirs, Uzi Narkiss, Amit’s assistant during the Sinai Campaign, described one such decision:

My natural place during the campaign was in the Main Command post… in an abandoned orchard near Kibbutz Na’an. This is where the Chief of Staff, too, should have been, at least in theory. But Moshe Dayan thought differently. He never even bothered to stay in regular contact with us. As a result, in those days, the burden of the overall management of the IDF fell on the shoulders of Meir Amit, the head of the General Staff Branch, and, in his absence, on me. On more than one occasion, Amit or I had to make decisions on matters that would, under normal circumstances, have been outside our purview. And Dayan himself would eventually become angry about some of them. On those occasions, he would say, “Well, what can you, back there in Israel, understand already?” and then, in hindsight, he would learn to live with our decisions.

On the first day of fighting, Yitzhak Rabin, Commander of the Northern Command, phoned me and said more or less that the Arabs villagers near Ayelet Hashahar are afraid and would like to be evacuated to Syria via the bridge at Bnot Yaakov. The Arabs agree, the U.N. agrees, and the Syrians agree. The only question is if we agree. After a second’s thought, I decided: absolutely, we agree. Rabin, who must have been worried that I’d get into trouble, said to me: “Uzi, maybe you should get somebody’s approval.” “I don’t know where Moshe is,” I answered, “and he’ll probably be back only late. Write down that the General Staff agreed. I’ll make sure to include it in writing in the war log.” And that’s how it went.[[122]](#footnote-122)

Shlomo Gazit, too, had to look for Dayan during the fighting, but according to him, it was Dayan who personally directed the field officers. Gazit added:

The change that Dayan instituted was that any operational plan made by the General Staff would not simply be imposed from the top down but would be followed by a stage of planning by the field officers, in planning groups and command groups. He would sit in the forward command room; he would be physically present, on the front line, during the implementation of the plan… This custom was introduced in those critical years. To my satisfaction, and the satisfaction of us all, this conduct is prevalent to this day in all army units.”[[123]](#footnote-123)

Dayan firmly believed that a commander, including the most senior, must be in the field. “You cannot know what war is from stories someone reports to you. If you really want to know, go into the field… Even someone who understand or thinks he understands what war is, to know it, he must see it, feel it – through field glasses or any other method.”[[124]](#footnote-124) Dayan spent most of the days of the campaign on the battlefield. He had no patience for conducting the campaign from a command post. Above all, he wanted to be on the spot at the locations where, by being present and gathering his own unfiltered impressions, he could have an impact on the outcome. Historian Mordechai Bar-On, who served as Dayan’s bureau chief, explained that Dayan thought it is right to be in the field both as a leader to rally the troops and as a military commander to make decisions at key moments. “In practice, in the field, in the battle, the outcome is determined by the combat troops who carry out the fighting.”[[125]](#footnote-125)

During the campaign, Dayan’s daily schedule involved flying to the front in a light aircraft, staying on the ground for hours at a time, and maneuvering among positions with a small group of commanders using two command vehicles. Towards evening, he would return to the Central Command Post to provide updates and further instructions, after which he would go to visit Ben-Gurion, who was ill at home, to update him about the day’s events.

Dayan was present at several important events on the battlefield. For example, he met up with Division 38 and the 7th Brigade during the critical hours of its early charge, which he had not managed to stop. But when he met them face-to-face on the battlefield, he directed the brigade commander and the Southern Command commander. Later on, he joined the charge of Division 77 in Rafah. During the fighting, Dayan took personal risks, coming under fire five times. There were some who found this behavior as irresponsible and unnecessary.

Dayan could engage in this style of command, referred to as leading from the front or forward command, because the campaign had been planned in a way that created the ideal conditions for the command style he preferred. Unlike most typical campaign objectives – such as destruction of enemy forces and conquest of territory – Dayan defined the objectives of the campaign to support the political objectives: mainly the collapse of the Egyptian army in the Sinai Peninsula and reaching certain locations. To this end, the IDF was to reach the Suez Canal quickly while conquering some critical points, including Sharm a-Sheikh, along the way, while also causing the Egyptian military forces to retreat in a panic. One notable element of the campaign was the absence of a specific destination where the forces were supposed to converge, as is customary in such campaigns. Instead, each force was supposed to advance independently of the others and reach its destination in the general vicinity of the Suez Canal.[[126]](#footnote-126)

In 1956, brigades enjoyed a great deal of independence in battlefield decision-making, and the ranks above them only guided them to ensure that the brigades’ actions would correspond with the goals set for them. The campaign Dayan planned required very little coordination, thus allowing the forces on the ground a high level of independence. Each tactical problem was handled separately, without regard for challenges in other sectors. Only in Sharm a-Sheikh was there an attempt to coordinate the entry of two forces from different directions to seize control of the area. The campaign was planned so that Dayan would be able to command from the front, and the general tendency was to rapidly improvise war maneuvers while advancing.[[127]](#footnote-127)

In his book *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, Dayan explained:

We can build our action on units that do not depend on one another and whose command posts, which must receive reports and give the required instructions, are found within the fighting units. Should we exploit this advantage, we will – after the initial breakthrough – be able to continue to fight the Egyptians before they have the chance to reorganize… I believe that we can conduct the fighting in a way that will not give them time to recoup after our attack and will not cause breaks in the battle. That is the basis for our plans. We will build separate forces for the main missions, and each force will have to reach its final destination with one battle, one breath – to fight and advance continuously from its breakthrough to the completion of its mission. I know that this approach is not suited to every campaign, but, in my opinion, it is correct under the current circumstances, with the arena being the Sinai Peninsula and the enemy being the Egyptian army. It is also suited to our army and the nature of our commanders. I can take an IDF unit commander and point out the Suez Canal for him and say, “This is your destination, and this is the route along which you should move. During the action, don’t call me to ask for help with manpower, fire, or vehicles. You already have all that we were able to allocate to you and no more. Report on progress. You must be at the canal [within] 48 hours.” I can give instructions like this to our unit commanders because I know they are ready and willing to accept such missions and are capable of carrying them out.[[128]](#footnote-128)

But this command style came at a price. Gen. Haim Laskov and Maj. Gen. Meir Zore’a wrote: “If the spirit of the commander encourages noble stallions to surge forward, it sometimes happens that these horses will not only run, but also kick, which is what happened with the 7th Brigade and at the Mitla Pass.”[[129]](#footnote-129)

On the other side of the aisle, Shlomo Gazit assessed Dayan’s command of the war in a positive light:

My own personal opinion is that Dayan’s approach is correct and appropriate. In the short wars the IDF conducts, the General Staff’s job is pretty much done by the time the first shot is fired. The General Staff has organized, equipped, and trained the units to fight, for better and for worse. It has also approved the battle plans. Control and decisions, if needed during the fighting, are best made in the field on the basis of unfiltered information about the real situation. There, on the ground, together with the commanders, the Chief of Staff can have an impact and decide the outcome.”[[130]](#footnote-130)

Historian Martin van Creveld, an expert in military command, had a similar assessment. He saw Dayan as an example of a commander who provides his staff with freedom of action to conduct routine command and control activities, while he focuses entirely on forward command on the battlefield. In Sinai, Dayan’s presence helped push the forces forward. However, as noted, this method can have a cost in terms of confusion and mistakes, which, in fact, occurred during the campaign. Nonetheless, van Creveld concluded, every campaign must be judged by its results.[[131]](#footnote-131)

Dayan neither invented this approach nor was he the first to apply it. However, he took it to its extreme, and thus enjoyed its full benefits. However, to the same extent, he suffered its full drawbacks. Forward command style was applied by prominent armored corps commanders in World War Two, the most famous of whom were Erwin Rommel, Heinz Guderian, and George Patton. The method was first developed primarily by the Germans for various historical reasons, and it favored a war of rapid movement that would cause the enemy lines to collapse within a short period of time.[[132]](#footnote-132) The significant difference between Dayan and the commanders mentioned above lay in the fact that they served as field commanders who answered to another echelon above them, often at a remove of several military command levels, whereas Dayan was the supreme military commander, answerable only to the political echelon. Still, the size of the arena and the scope of forces if which the other commanders were in charge were not smaller, and at times, were significantly larger than those Dayan commanded.

The forward command approach in rapid maneuvering warfare relies on the mission command approach (the original German term is *Auftragstaktik*).[[133]](#footnote-133) The central tenet of this approach is that maximal decision-making authority should be granted to subordinates after the command echelon clarifies to them that their mission is part of a greater objective. In that context, the mission is always realized in light of the objective, and if the situation on the ground changes and the mission is no longer relevant, the commander on the ground is free to decide to change it or even abort it.[[134]](#footnote-134)

Another aspect of this approach is the double command system of the chief of operations (G3) (or the Chief of Staff in some cases) together with the commander, whereby the two together form a unified team. The chief of operations (G3), who remains in the command post for command-and-control purposes, coupled with a commander in the field who is present to examine and assess the situation up close, have an impact at critical decision-making junctures, when timing is critical, and there is a need to rally the fighting forces. Successfully achieving this type of command system requires profound understanding and absolute trust between the commander and his chief of operation. British historian Spencer Wilkinson described the relationship as so deep that the chief of operations could be considered “the alter ego of the commander.”[[135]](#footnote-135) Military history is familiar with several such pairs, e.g. Gen. Herman Balck (Commander) and Gen. Friedrich von Mellenthin (Chief of Staff) who commanded the German Panzer Corps on the eastern front in World War Two; and the better known Gen. Paul von Hindenburg (Commander) and Gen. Erich Ludendorff (Chief of Staff), who commanded the Russian front in World War One.

The famous German Chief of Staff Helmuth von Moltke the Elder, considered responsible for integrating the of mission command approach into the German army, believed that most preparations and decisions are actually made before war breaks out. Later, most decisions are made by the field commanders on the spot. Moltke led the Prussian army through three wars at the end of the 19th century and was victorious in them all. He rarely intervened in the course of a campaign, doing so only on those occasions when he felt his input was critical. Even then, his instructions would sometimes arrive at the battlefield too late. Ever since the advent of modern communications technology and the increasing complexity of military organizations and campaigns, commanders have been able to stay in constant communication with their subordinates, and have tended to get more involved in what happens on the battlefield.

It is imperative, though, that the commander maintains the authority to make the “fundamental decisions” – as defined in the doctrine – for himself and not confer the authority to make them on others. These include “decisions related to the objective, mission, factors affecting [the campaign, such as political constraints], operational concept, methods of action of our forces and those of the enemy, operational outline, operational plan, and operation’s order.”[[136]](#footnote-136) The commander is the only person authorized to make these fundamental decisions.

The fundamental decisions will differ depending on the particular geopolitical military context. In the case of Israel, where a war might be fought on a number of fronts simultaneously, the Chief of Staff is generally forced to make only a limited number of fundamental decisions at some point during the fighting. For example, on October 6, 1973, at the beginning of the Yom Kippur War, one fundamental decision was to divert the air force to attack the Syrian defensive missile batteries in the north instead of the Egyptian batteries in the south (execute Operation *Dogman 5* and abort Operation *Tagar 4*). Another example is the decision to send the one division held in strategic reserve, Armored Division 146 commanded by Moshe (Mussa) Peled, to the North rather than to the South. In the case of a single front war, such as the Sinai Campaign, there were not many decisions that needed the General Staff’s intervention. During the fighting, the Chief of Staff generally counsels and supervises the various commands and provides briefings to the government. In a single front war, there are very few critical decisions the Chief of Staff must make on the spot. Furthermore, a gifted Chief of Operations officer, such as Meir Amit, who was closely familiar with the situation in general and the spirit of of his commander in particular, was perfectly capable of taking over and letting his Chief of Staff move to the front to assess the situation with his own eyes. The Chief of Staff’s presence on the ground at critical junctures can be highly significant.

The most important military thinker of all time, Carl von Clausewitz, famously noted that war is the “kingdom of uncertainty.” Today, there is not a single military officer anywhere who cannot quote this saying, but few understand it in depth and even fewer are capable of operating in accordance with its ramifications. Today, the IDF’s main headquarters referred to as “The Pit” and is located in the Kirya (Headquarters) in the center of Tel Aviv. It is equipped with the most advanced telecommunications devices available fed by the best forms of information gathering satellites, UAVs, and advanced tools for monitoring and transmitting communication. The Israeli Chief of Staff can sit in “The Pit,” receive very accurate information about every arena in real time and conduct the campaign from there.[[137]](#footnote-137)

In Dayan’s time, none of this existed. While wireless communication was used, the devices did not always work very well and the situation assessment received from the battlefield was often fragmented, confused, and very delayed.[[138]](#footnote-138) Had Dayan stayed at the Command Center, it is safe to assume he would not have managed to get an accurate impression of the battle in real time; therefore, his presence on the ground was more beneficial than his presence at the Command Center would have been.

Dayan’s style of forward command, even if it less suited to today’s technological reality, is not without rationale or value. His style of command is rarely practiced these days because of fear of failures and errors and worries about possible committees of inquiry. Dayan, however, operated in an era in which he was free of the restrictive combination of modern technology and rigid social norms in this regard.

**The Campaign’s Lessons for the IDF**

Despite its errors and flaws, the Sinai Campaign was ultimately a great success. The entry of the 7th Brigade earlier than expected did not cause the political damage Dayan had worried about, and significantly contributed to the IDF’s offensive momentum. The paratroopers’ troubles in the unnecessary battle at the Mitla Pass caused heavy losses, but it had no systemic impact on the campaign. The failed attempts of the 10th and 27th Brigades to conquer Um Qatef did not delay the campaign and essentially had no effect on it; and the positions fell after being abandoned by the exhausted, encircled Egyptian soldiers. There were other botched moves, which are to be expected in any large-scale military clash, but ultimately, all the objectives of the eight-day blitzkrieg were attained at the cost of 172 dead, three missing-in-action, and 817 wounded – far fewer than the estimate of 250 dead Dayan had originally given to Ben-Gurion.

In the post-war period, Dayan spearheaded processes meant to ensure that the IDF learned valuable lessons from the campaign. Shlomo Gazit gave an account of one the debriefing sessions Dayan held. After listening to his commanders’ complaints Dayan said:

I listened to the debates for two whole days; I heard the many comments and claims made by the disputants who appeared here about what was lacking, what was flawed, what was impaired. And then I sked myself, “Wait a minute… Who actually won this war? The Egyptians or we? … If we did, how do we explain the huge gap between this phenomenal victory and the endless list of all the things that are wrong with the army?” I can only draw but one clear, unequivocal conclusion: we won not despite everything we lacked but because of everything we lacked. We won because, in recent years, the IDF has been able to focus on what really matters – only on whatever can bring about a decision in war with the clear, unequivocal knowledge that we are wronging all other issues and discriminating against them, because they are not critical to achieving a decision. We did not spread our resources along all parts of the sector; we focused on what mattered.”[[139]](#footnote-139)

With this statement, Dayan expressed what researcher Yitzhak Ben-Israel calls “the force-building approach of the relative advantage.” As the people’s army of a small nation, the IDF will always suffer from a certain disadvantage. As such, Israel has no choice but to take the route of focusing effort on areas in which it can create a relative advantage, making conscious decisions to neglect certain areas in order to create a relative advantage can wrest a decisive victory from the enemy.[[140]](#footnote-140) In terms of having a relative advantage, certain clear lessons emerged from the war, first and foremost prioritizing building up the forces of the armored corps and the air force.[[141]](#footnote-141) The most surprising discovery of the Sinai Campaign, however, was the tremendous power of the armored corps,[[142]](#footnote-142) which led to a genuine revolution in the IDF. Uri Ben Ari, the commander of the 7th Brigade, who would one day become commander of the Armored Corps, wrote: “The outcome of the Kadesh Campaign… represents a revolution in the IDF’s strategic military thinking in general and in that of the Armored Corps in particular.”[[143]](#footnote-143)

Haim Laskov, the Armored Corps commander who received advanced military training in the United Kingdom and adopted a strict British Army approach, and Moshe Dayan, the “partisan,” could not have been more dissimilar, yet Dayan admired Laskov’s professionalism and his vast knowledge of military matters, while Laskov admired Dayan’s creativity. Of Dayan, Laskov reflected: “It was said that administration was not his strong suit. Perhaps. But he passed the most important test of all: he produced bricks of force out of a miniscule amount of straw.”[[144]](#footnote-144) Dayan and Laskov had essential differences of opinion about the deployment of the armored corps in war. Generally, the disagreement between them is presented as follows: Dayan viewed the armored corps as serving a supporting role for the infantry. He did not know how to operate armored troops in the modern manner, as had the Germans in World War Two, and have all other armies since then. Laskov, on the other hand, promoted a program whereby armored troops would be organized in independent brigades. The war in Sinai proved Laskov right. To Dayan’s credit, it must be said that he admitted his mistake, and after the war, he worked to transform the armored troops into a corps that would form the backbone of the IDF’s ground forces.

However, reality was more complicated at the time. Dayan felt that the equipment available to the IDF – light French AMX tanks and used American Sherman tanks – could not provide what was needed. His opinion was reinforced by the fact that during the army maneuvers, many tanks developed mechanical problems and most of them never reached their destination. Mordechai (Motta) Gur cited a senior commander, apparently Dayan, when he observed: “One would have to be a genius to believe that tanks, especially those that were shipped to Israel, would be able to travel all the way to the canal.”[[145]](#footnote-145)

As a result, like many others in Israel’s command echelon, Dayan felt that tanks, without support forces moving with them, such as motorized or armored infantry and self-driven (not towed) cannons, would not be able to seize enemy posts alone. The second limitation on deploying the armored corps was the decrepit state of the tanks, which made it impossible for them to cross large desert expanses. As we have already seen, the “Pelet” field exercise in May 1956, a combined armored troops and infantry military exercise that tested the capabilities of the former, persuaded Dayan and most of the senior commanders that the IDF’s armored vehicles were incapable of leading a significant maneuver in the Sinai Desert, mostly because of their mechanical condition.[[146]](#footnote-146)

After the drill, the Chief of Staff’s logbook noted the following:

The only tangible result of this maneuver was the last gasp of readiness of the armored troops in term of the tanks’ usability. One Sherman tank burned to a cinder and many broke down. But especially dire was the condition of the AMXs. Of 60, 40 are now out of commission… Were it necessary to operate all of the armored troops at the same time, it is highly doubtful that [the IDF] would be capable of putting more than 50 tanks on the battlefield.[[147]](#footnote-147)

In hindsight, the field exercise the IDF held that summer to prepare the three armored brigade formations for war, which was expected to break out in the fall of 1956, led to the almost total breakdown of these formations. On the eve of the agreement with the French and immediately thereafter, it was clear that it would be impossible to go to war in this state. The logbook from Dayan’s office noted:

The Chief of Staff issued a strict command banning the use of AMX tanks for patrol and other functions requiring long distance driving. If and when a technical way is found to keep the tanks from breaking down due to the dust and sand, the AMX should be viewed only as a mobile anti-tank cannon. All tactical movements are to be limited to changing firing positions.[[148]](#footnote-148)

Because of the problems that came to light during the “Pelet” exercise, Laskov, who had outstanding organizational skills and, as already mentioned, was an enthusiastic supporter of making armored troops into a decisive corps on the ground, was appointed to rebuild the corps. His appointment prolonged and even exacerbated the argument between his and Dayan’s approaches. At the end of August 1956, Dayan decided to hold an extended debate in which General Staff officers would be able to share their opinions. Dayan’s position was articulated in a document he entitled “How Will the Armored Troops Fight?”[[149]](#footnote-149) The basic idea, explained in great detail, was to distribute armored troops among the infantry formations. Laskov, on the other hand, formulated a document in which he called for concentrating all the armored troops into a single division, which would serve as a strike force and whose main function would be to surge ahead and destroy the enemy’s armored troops. Another argument revolved around Laskov’s demand to provide the armored troops force status, similar to that of the Air Force.

The decisive debate, which took place on September 1, 1956, was chaired by Defense Minister and Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion and the Director General of the Defense Ministry Shimon Peres. After the sides presented their positions and the General Staff generals discussed the matter, Dayan summarized the meeting by saying that Laskov’s approach had some good points, and Laskov, too, highlighted the aspects of Dayan’s approach that he found acceptable, although he was still critical of it overall.[[150]](#footnote-150)

In fact, before the war began, Dayan determined that the battle would be decided by mobile infantry reaching the targets while tanks would be brought by tank carriers. Armored Corps historian Amiad Bresner wrote: “The execution differed radically from anything Dayan’s doctrine foresaw.” The armored forces led by tanks did well with the missions they were assigned. Bresner added:

It would be right to say that Laskov’s doctrine, which favored maximal concentration of armor within an armored division, was also not realized… Armored brigades operated in brigade settings; the two armored brigades that were relatively ready for action were split – one along each axis of movement – with a third armored brigade far from the scene of action… The action of the 7th Brigade represented a small-scale application of Laskov’s doctrine.[[151]](#footnote-151)

This leads to the question of why the IDF operated neither according to Dayan’s nor Laskov’s doctrines. The answer has to do with the enemy’s conduct and the battlefield reality that developed, as well as with it being another manifestation of the flexibility in troop deployment and local freedom of action Dayan gave his commanders in the field. In fact, in this respect, although Laskov criticized Dayan, he admired “his audacity and broad strategic vision.”[[152]](#footnote-152)

Dayan’s flexibility of thought proved itself again and left a deep impression. Meir Zore’a (Zaro) said of Dayan: “At the right moment, he understood that what those crazy people had said about armored troops was real and therefore ordered that it be implemented.”[[153]](#footnote-153) As early as November 2, as the key battles in Sinai were ending, Dayan realized that an armored revolution had occurred in the IDF, and, at a General Staff meeting, he said: “With all due respect to the 10th and 11th Brigades, it must be said that the armored troops did most of the work… All actions to date were undertaken by means of armored troops and planes.”[[154]](#footnote-154)

Years later, Dayan recalled that time as follows:

I can say that the question of how to operate the armored forces did come up. I, Moshe Dayan from Nahalal, didn’t know about it. For me, the infantry was the “queen of battle” and the function of everyone else was to assist her… The armored forces are an independent force and, instead of the armored assisting the infantry, an inverse situation was created. The armored forces are an independent force [that] needs some assistance, including artillery and to a certain extent, assistance from the infantry.[[155]](#footnote-155)

However, beyond any of this, the foremost lesson Dayan learned from the war in Sinai was the importance of speed. And he again came to the realization that, in war, a commander must be personally present on the battlefield.[[156]](#footnote-156) The Sinai Campaign also proved the advantages of taking a proactive stance, such as beginning a preventive war or landing a preliminary strike, an approach that was used in the next decade in the Six Day War. The conclusion was that in the future, too, wars would be short because of the political component and the pressure exerted by the world powers. Another factor that dictated the need for a short war was the use of the reserves, which had been deployed for the first time in large numbers. These constraints led to planning a campaign that would lead to a decisive and rapid collapse of the enemy. A year after the Sinai Campaign, Dayan spoke in favor of force building based on the relative advantage principle,[[157]](#footnote-157) saying: “I’m for us building our force in the near future on offense and strong, rapid, execution capabilities rather than on defense… We must focus our preference of one at the expense of the other. To satisfy all – that is not my objective.”[[158]](#footnote-158)

At a gathering of the senior command echelon that took place on December 27, 1956, shortly after the Sinai campaign, Dayan stressed the importance of speed in battle. Dayan felt that speed was the most significant advantage the IDF had over the Arab armies. He warned that superfluous planning could create unnecessary burdens and cause the army to focus on the marginal instead of on the central issues, thereby undermining the important element of speed. Over and over again, he expressed the concern that the lesson from the Sinai Campaign might result in overplanning. He was also bothered by the issue of logistics and supply, which, according to Dayan, had to be able to keep up with the maneuvering force and not the other way around.[[159]](#footnote-159) Dayan added a further warning: the Sinai Campaign was atypical, because it ran more or less according to plan.[[160]](#footnote-160)

Dayan was afraid that the orderly procedures and logistical forces would stop the fighting forces, the “noble stallions” he so favored and nurtured. He feared too many procedures are introduced that might limit the IDF commanders and force them to act according to orderly procedures and abide them to the strict command and control chain, not allowing them to maneuver this way or that, as he was used to doing. He also worried about overplanning, which could undermine improvisation and initiative. In practice, in the Sinai Campaign, the maneuvering forces advanced rapidly, and the logistical forces had trouble keeping up. Dayan was afraid that the maneuvering forces would be subordinated to pace of the logistical forces, rather than the other way around.[[161]](#footnote-161)

On an ethical level, Dayan rebuked the commanders for poor treatment of prisoners of war, including shootings, considering such behavior damaging to both Jews and Arabs. It could damage the Arabs’ opinion about Israel and the possibility that the peoples would be able to live side-by-side in peace in the future. He also felt it harmed Israeli society and could corrupt the country’s youth. The issue of looting posed another ethical problem for Dayan, who emphasized that: “Anyone who brings [as much as] a watch home is like someone sticking a knife into the body of the IDF.”[[162]](#footnote-162)

As Chief of Staff, Dayan was mainly responsible for building up the army’s forces and for its optimal operation in wartime. When he assumed the position, the IDF was at the lowest point in its history. Three years of building up the forces and training the IDF commanders, when Dayan was leaving the post, the IDF proved that it could take the Sinai Peninsula in eight days, parachute a paratrooper force deep into enemy territory, and operate armored units that crossed hundreds of kilometers of desert terrain. Moreover, the IDF proved itself capable of conducting joint air and ground battles and executing special operations based on intelligence. As Dayan said, the Sinai Campaign “gave the IDF its wings.”[[163]](#footnote-163) Dayan laid all the foundations for building the forces, which were continued and expanded during Haim Laskov’s and Yitzhak Rabin’s tenures as Chief of Staff, a fact that became amply evident in the Six Day War. According to no less than Ezer Weitzman, the head of the Operations Division during that war: “In terms of the ground armies, there is no doubt that the action in 1956 contributed most of the knowledge and experience in attaining the lightning-speed victory in 1967.”[[164]](#footnote-164)

**The Campaign’s Achievements**

In the study of history, there is a constant tension between two schools of thought. One, the structural school, emphasizes the geopolitical structures and inherent interests, which dictate action. According to the structuralists, the impact of any one leader is marginal, because events are determined by the very structure of the interests involved. In contrast, the personality school of thought stresses the importance of character and decisions of the leader in the shaping of world events.

France, Great Britain, and Israel were on a collision course with Egypt, each for its own reasons, regardless of the character or personality of this leader or the other. However, the personalities of the leaders played a significant role in the historical drama. Nasser was a clear example; it was his personal charisma and vision that brought the Arab world under his leadership, but the character of the other leaders in the crisis was crucial as well: Ben-Gurion, hesitant about embarking on a military adventure, needed the confidence Dayan gave him. Dayan promised Ben-Gurion that Israel’s losses would be low, and at the critical juncture, it was Dayan who came up with a creative solution that made it possible for Ben-Gurion to make the decision to take a risk. It is doubtful that Ben-Gurion would have given his approval to go to war without this.

The Sinai Campaign was not an immediate result of reprisals or routine security, but the outcome of a combination of several geostrategic events, only some of which were directly linked to Israel. Having become convinced that the reprisals were no longer achieving their goal, Dayan sought an opportunity to attack Egypt. Because Ben-Gurion was hesitant, the alliance with France and Great Britain provided a chance to strike under the aegis of the global powers, thus allaying the “old man’s” fears that Israel would find itself alone in a war against Egypt without assurances of political aid, not to mention military assistance. For Ben-Gurion, enlisting a global power to stand with Israel was the supreme value in his approach to security; the option France offered Israel – strengthening the alliance versus cooling relations should Israel decide not to cooperate – together with the fact that France presented the only opportunity for attaining support from an important global power, tipped the scales. In the moment of truth, Dayan’s contribution lay in untying the knots Ben-Gurion had tied. When Ben-Gurion asked Dayan “Remind me again: why are we going to war?” he knew the answer all too well: France. French Prime Minister Guy Mollet had made it clear to Ben-Gurion that cooperation in the nuclear field was tied to Israel’s cooperation with regard to Egypt.[[165]](#footnote-165) France made Ben-Gurion an offer he couldn’t refuse. The temptation – settling accounts with Egypt and also making an ally of a global power – was simply too much to resist. Nevertheless, historian Avi Shlaim was correct to stress that the "reactor was an added bonus. His (B.G) overall aim at this time was to consolidate the alliance with France."[[166]](#footnote-166)

France viewed the campaign as part of its war in Algeria, while Great Britain was motivated by its fears over the fate of the Suez Canal.[[167]](#footnote-167) Neither power achieved its objective. Worse, the campaign entrenched their status in the new world order as second-tier powers. Not only did Nasser’s regime not fall; it grew stronger, an early example of the thinking that a non-defeat is no different than a victory, an idea that would, years later, be honed by Hizballah and Hamas in their clashes with Israel. The essence of the idea is that surviving an encounter with much larger forces ensures the continuation of the struggle equals victory. Because they saw themselves as victors, Nasser and Egypt did not accept the separation of forces that a foreign nation was again imposing on Egyptian soil. Their perception that the agreement was humiliating led to a new countdown to the next major crisis. The Israeli leadership, including Dayan, blinded by the success of the Sinai Campaign, found it difficult to understand the matter of Egypt’s national pride. It was a blind spot in Dayan, one he would correct later on.[[168]](#footnote-168)

Israel undoubtedly benefited from the war. The Egyptian army was crushed and did not return to Sinai in large numbers until the escalation of 1967. The infiltrations into Israel also ended, and the border area was calm. Ten years after the war, Dayan summarized Israel’s achievements in an article in a special issue of *Maarakhot* devoted to the Sinai Campaign. He identified the direct objectives attained – chief among them freedom of Israel shipping, the end of infiltrations, and the defeat of the Egyptian army, all of which had been clearly defined before the start of the war.

Jonathan Shimshoni, Brigadier General in the IDF who studied Israel’s deterrence, summarized the achievements of the Sinai Campaign, writing that although Israel was forced to withdraw, the war completely changed the balance of deterrence between Israel and Egypt. The Fedayeen units were entirely eliminated, the Egyptians deployed far fewer troops in the Sinai Peninsula, the blockade on the Straits of Tiran was lifted until 1967, and Nasser agreed to the U.N. peacekeeping force on his soil, i.e., in Sinai and the Gaza Strip. All of these are clear indications of Israel’s success. Shimshoni quotes from the biography of Nasser penned by French journalist and historian Jean Lacouture: “Nasser prefers the humiliating partition provided by the U.N. to the possibility of another clash with Moshe Dayan’s army.”[[169]](#footnote-169)

However, there were broader achievements as well. Dayan noted the increased might of the IDF, a result of the alliance with France. Through its tripartite coalition, Israel acquired a new status and proved itself as a strong, determined nation., As Dayan wrote in an article, “After the Suez crises, the updated ‘who’s who’ now counts the Israeli army as the strongest in the Middle East and Israel has, in the eyes of the global powers, grown from a minor who needs to be cared for and coddled to a potential ally that can be relied on and called on for help.”[[170]](#footnote-170)

Despite Nasser’s belligerent rhetoric, the Egyptian border remained calm for the coming decade. Dayan admitted that the Allies had hoped to topple Nasser and replace his regime with one sympathetic to the West. But a decade later, with the wisdom of hindsight, it would emerge that replacing the leader of Egypt would not have changed much, as throughout the Middle East, all pro-Western regimes were being replaced by anti-Western ones. Nasser’s fall would not have changed the French retreat from Algeria or the British withdrawal from the Middle East.

Dayan concluded the article with two interesting observations. The first was about Gaza. He wrote that he regretted having given the Gaza Strip to Egypt, believing that if it had remained under IDF control, it would have been possible to reach an arrangement with Jordan. Jordan would then have settled the Gaza Strip refugees on its soil and built a port in Gaza to link it with the Mediterranean Sea. His second observation concerned the U.N. observers stationed in Sinai. Dayan opposed having a foreign force serving as a barrier, believing that both sides would eventually have to get used to the presence of the other. He wrote, “I prefer a normalization of hostility to artificial arrangements… The barrier of foreign forces only serves to create a fiction of neighborly relations and thus postpones peace.”[[171]](#footnote-171)

Various parties have criticized the war’s achievements. Some have claimed the campaign delayed peace and entrenched Arab hostility, specifically Nasser’s, to Israel. It has also been claimed that Israel “sullied itself” by cooperating with European imperialism.[[172]](#footnote-172) But, in hindsight, it is difficult to argue with the Sinai Campaign’s political successes. Because of it, no one presented Israel with all sorts of proposals – e.g., Plan Alpha – that would break off portions of its territory. Israel’s deterrence vis-à-vis the regional nations was enhanced and Israel’s global status improved. Thanks to the war, Israel signed diplomatic agreements with Iran, Turkey, and Ethiopia, as well as many African nations with which Israel would enjoy flourishing relations for over a decade. Israel’s relations with France became even more friendly and generated the benefits Israel expected – that is, until the Six-Day War, when French policy did an about-face and became pro-Arab. After the withdrawal from Sinai was complete Israel’s relations with the United States also improved. In fact, this was when the United States started to see Israel as a nation with capabilities, an island of stability in a volatile region of a Cold War world. Historian Yagil Henkin summarized the benefits of the Sinai Campaign: "With the hindsight of 60 years, [we see that] Suez played a crucial role in transforming Israel in the eyes of the world from a fledgling state, a haven for Holocaust refugees and Jews who were forced to leave Arab countries, to a regional power.”[[173]](#footnote-173) Domestically, too, the ten years following the Sinai Campaign were among the calmest in the history of the state, allowing for the assimilation of waves of immigrants and the peace and quiet so important for laying a socioeconomic infrastructure.

For Dayan personally, the Sinai Campaign was a high point in his career: it made him an international celebrity. Journalists flocked to his doorstep seeking interviews. Not only statesmen wanted to meet him, but also movie stars, singers, and other celebrities. About a year before his discharge from the army, in November 1957, he toured several nations – Burma, Italy, France, and the U.K. were on his itinerary – to meet with colleagues. In the U.K., famed historian and military thinker Sir Basil Henry Liddell Hart arranged for Dayan to meet with legendary Field Marshal Bernard Law Montgomery, who was then serving as the Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe. While Montgomery treated Dayan like an equal with whom he could share ideas, he still did most of the talking. It is notable that, about a decade earlier, Montgomery, as Chief of the Imperial General Staff, was in charge for puting down the rebellion of the Jewish underground organizations against British rule in Palestine. Liddell Hart noted that he had never before heard Monty speak so openly. He also told Dayan that when he walked the field marshal to his car, Monty told him, “Dayan is tough but I like him.”[[174]](#footnote-174)

**Dayan’s Retirement from Military Life**

After the war, Dayan often lectured to officers about the war and its lessons. He also led debriefings to study military conclusions, and participated in different forums dealing with the war. However, he focused his attention primarily on political developments in Israel and the world. The details of the military withdrawal and the administrative issues involved were handled by the staff divisions under Meir Amit’s leadership. Dayan was not asked to deal with them, nor did he ask to do so. He focused his attention on one subject: the difficult negotiations that Ben-Gurion, via Golda Meri and Abba Eban, was conducting with the U.S. administration about Israel’s withdrawal from Sinai.

Nonetheless, it was clear that Dayan’s days on the General Staff were numbered. In the last months of his tenure as Chief of Staff, he was mostly involved with political matters, especially international Middle East policy. He was pessimistic as usual. He worried about the closer ties being forged by the Soviet Union with the Arab nations, and even though he didn’t believe that the Arab nations would dare to start a war with Israel on their own in the near future, he realized that they were liable to do so with the help of the USSR.[[175]](#footnote-175)

In November 1957, Ben-Gurion made peace with Dayan’s decision to leave the military. He decided to appoint Haim Laskov in Dayan’s stead. Dayan was not thrilled with the choice, but accepted Ben-Gurion’s pick and cooperated with his replacement. Laskov’s recommendation to Ben-Gurion was to leave Dayan in the position: “Thanks to Moshe, there’s a light in the army; not a light – lightning,”[[176]](#footnote-176) he told him. But the matter was closed, and Dayan told Laskov that until he assumed office, he – Dayan – would not make any decisions Laskov disagreed with.

Laskov, and Yitzhak Rabin after him, continued the IDF’s force construction using Dayan’s paradigm. Years later, when Laskov was asked about the differences between his and Dayan’s tenures as Chief of Staff, he said, “I supported Dayan’s approach, which encouraged a fighting spirit and combat values, an approach based on an austerity budget. I didn’t disagree with Dayan about any of these and I continued his direction.”[[177]](#footnote-177) Laskov provided impetus for a line drawn after 1956 and built an army based on armor and an air force, capable of executing rapid, decisive campaigns of maneuvers.

Despite certain differences in personalities between the two, a relationship of deep mutual admiration developed between them in the years to come. Dayan respected Laskov, saying of him that he was probably the only Haganah veteran “who appreciated his way of thinking and understood where he was going.” He knew that Laskov had great qualities that a military organization could use and that he lacked himself. Laskov used to say, “From Moses [the biblical figure] to Moses [Moshe Dayan] there has been none like Moses,”[[178]](#footnote-178) and even though he was aware of Dayan’s flaws and often criticized him for them, he was certain that they in no way detracted from Dayan’s leadership or ability to think. He compared Dayan to British Vice-Admiral Horatio Nelson, adding, “A rare blend – a simultaneously rebellious and loyal commander.” These contradictions manifested themselves even in Dayan’s letter of farewell to Ben-Gurion.[[179]](#footnote-179) Above all, Dayan excelled as Chief of Staff thanks to his ability to take both a military and a political view simultaneously, a trait on full display in the planning of the Sinai Campaign. Later, Maj. Gen. Rehavam (Gandhi) Zeevi would say of him, “We, as military men, are interested in the professional side of things: a better-informed use of the tank, this ammunition, that cannon, and so on. But Dayan, more than any other commander I’ve known, integrated the political side into the military. He did this even as far back as his time in the Southern Command.”[[180]](#footnote-180)

The changing of the guard – the ceremony in which the Chief of Staff baton was handed from Dayan to Laskov – took place on January 29, 1958. In his farewell to the soldiers of the IDF, Dayan congratulated them and thanked them for their dedication and self-sacrifice. He mentioned the names of some of those who fell on his watch – generals as well as rank and file soldier.[[181]](#footnote-181)

The period of generalship had ended. The next chapter – Dayan’s life in politics and matters of state – was just beginning.

1. Much has been written about the events that led to the Sinai Campaign. In this book, I have relied on the writings of Mordechai Bar-On, who was Moshe Dayan’s bureau chief at that time, and on other studies that have come out in recent years: Bar-On, 1991; Bar-On, 1992, Haggai Golan and Shaul Shay (eds.), *Bir’om hamano’im: 50 shana lemilhemet Sinai* (Hebrew) (*When the Engines Roared: 50th Anniversary of the Sinai War*), Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 2006; Evron, 1986; Bar-On (ed.), 2017; Moshe Shemesh and Ilan Troan (eds.), *Mivtsa Kadesh uma’arekhet Suez 1956: Iyun mehadash* (Hebrew) (*The Sinai Campaign and the Suez Crisis: A Reassessment*), The Ben-Gurion Heritage Institute, Sde Boker, 1994; Dayan, 1966; Michael Oren, *The Origins of the Second Arab-Israeli War*, FrankCass, U.K., 1992; Yagil Henkin, 2015; Zaki Shalom, *Mediniyut betsel mahloket: Mediniyut habitahon hashotef shel yisrael 1949–1956* (Hebrew) (*Policy in the Shadow of Disagreement: Israel’s Routine Security Policy 1949*–*1956*), Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 1996. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. British officer Sir John Bagot Glubb (aka Glubb Pasha) headed the Legion from 1939 until 1945. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Henkin, 2015, p. 19. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Convention between Great Britain, Germany, Austria-Hungary, Spain, France, Italy, The Netherlands, Russia and turkey, respecting the free navigation of the Suez maritime canal signed at Constantinople, October 29, 1888. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid, p. 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Mati Greenberg, “The Background to the War and Its Steps: An Overview” (Hebrew), in Golan and Shay (eds.), 2006, pp. 11–14. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Henkin, 2015, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Dayan, 1976, p. 174; Barnoach-Matalon, 2009, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. The Baghdad Pact was a defense treaty signed in February 1955 by Iraq, Turkey, and Pakistan, which were joined about two months later by the U.K. and Iran. It was a geostrategic regional alliance meant to create a physical barrier between the Soviet Union and the nations of the Middle East. Moshe Sharett tried to find a way for Israel to join but was rebuffed at once. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See: Office of the Historian, Draft Memorandum from Francis H. Russell to the Secretary of State, Foreign Relations of The United States, 1955–1957, Arab-Israeli Dispute, 1955, Volume XIV, Washington, May 24 (American dates?), 1955. At: <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v14/d107> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bar-On, 1992, p. 110. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Ibid, p. 123. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Henkin, 2015, p. 60. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Spoken by Rick Blaine (played by Humphrey Bogart) at the end of *Casablanca* (1942), this is one of the iconic one-liners made famous by the film. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid, p. 54. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. These tanks were of significantly lower quality than Soviet tanks the Egyptians had acquired through the Czech arms deal. Israel had hoped for tanks of equal quality but was forced to make do with what was on offer. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Dayan, 1976, p. 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Ibid, p. 207. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cited in: Keith Kyle, *Suez: Britain’s End of Empire in the Middle East* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), pp. 200. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Bar-On, 2014, p. 137. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Ibid, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Ibid, p. 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Uzi Eilam, *Night Raid, Retaliation Actions from Defense to Initiative*, (Rishon Letzion: Yedioth Ahronoth Books and Chemed Books, 2020), p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Henkin, 2015, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Yuval Shoham, “The Target: The Israeli Air Force” (Hebrew), *Biton heyl ha’avir*, No. 193, June 2010, <http://www.iaf.org.il/5571-34955-he/IAF.aspx>. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Cited in: Bar-On, 1992, p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Dayan, 1966, p. 49. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Bar-On, 1992, p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Dayan, 1976, p. 223. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Henkin, 2015, p. 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Bar-On, 2014, p. 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. For more on the visit, see: Henkin, 2015, Chapter 4, p. 93. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Henkin, 2015, p. 95. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Golani, 1997, Vol. 1, p. 279. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid, p. 278. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Mordechai Bar-On, “The Impact of Political Considerations on Operational Planning” [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Yona Bendman, “Egypt: The Egyptian Army in the Sinai Campaign” (Hebrew), in: Shemesh and Troan (eds.), 1994, p. 65; Henkin, 2015, p. 48. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Bendman, 1994, p. 71. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Ibid, p. 68. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Golani, 1997, Vol. 1, p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Bar-On, 1994, p. 185. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Dayan, 1976, p. 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Dayan, 1966, Appendix 2, p. 180. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Bar-On, 1994, p. 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. “Kadesh 1” and “Kadesh 2” are mentioned in Dayan’s book *Diary of the Sinai Campaign*, pp. 185–187. “Kadesh 2” was the updated version of “Kadesh 1,” planned after Dayan’s return from the Sèvres conferences. The plan took into account the political dictates decided on during that conference. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. The relationship between the IDF and Liddell Hart, who coined the phrase “indirect approach,” was a close one. IDF officers frequently used the phrase, whose general meaning was the attempt to avoid the places where the enemy is strong and, instead, attack those of the enemy’s weak spots that, if damaged, would cause the enemy to collapse; and use lots of ruses, surprises, and deceit. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Amit, 1999, pp. 67*–*69. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bar-On, 1992, p. 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Ibid, p. 269. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Dayan, 1976, p. 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Ibid, p. 255. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Bar-On, 1992, p. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. For a detailed account in English of the conference see: Avi Shlaim, "The Protocol of Séevres, 1956: anatomy of a war plot*." International Affairs* 73, no. 3 (1997): 509-530. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid., p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Dayan, 1976. p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Cited in Shlaim p. 516. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Cited in: Bar-On, 2006, p. 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Mordechai Bar-On, “Three Days in Sèvres, October 1956: Personal Testimony” (Hebrew), in: Haggai Golan and Shaul Shay, *Birom hameno’im*, Maarakhot, Tel Aviv, 2006, p. 23. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. From Israel’s point of view, the possibility of the Iraqi army entering Jordan equaled the crossing of a red line because the significance was a strong military coalition on the east threatening to split Israel at its narrow waist. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Paul Gaujac, "France and the Crises of Suez: An Appraisal Forty Years" in David Tal, (Ed) *The 1956 War: Collusion and Rivalry in the Middle East*. (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014). p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Dayan, 1976, p. 262. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Ibid, p. 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Yossi Melman, “Sinai Campaign plan on cigarette packet; IDF Archive reveals secret files from the Sinai Campaign, *Haaretz*, October 7, 2006. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Bar-On, 2006, p. 32. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Bar-On, 1992, p. 285. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. For the document’s fate, see: Mordechai Bar-On, *Gvulot ashenim: Iyunim betoldot medinat yisrael 1948–1976* (Hebrew) (*Smoking Borders: Studies in Israeli History 1948–1976*), Yad Ben Zvi, 2001. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Cited in: Bar-On, 1992, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Bar-On, in: Shemesh and Troan, 1994, p. 191. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Shlomo Gazit, *Bitsmatim makhri’im: Mehapalmah lerashut aman* (Hebrew) (*Critical Junctures: From the Palmach to the Head of MI*), Miskal, Rishon Lezion, 2016, p. 94. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Dayan, 1976, p. 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Bar-On, in: Shemesh Troan, 1994, p. 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Edward Luttwak, *Strategy: The Logic of War and Peace*, Revised Edition, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2001), p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cited in: Golan, 1997, p. 425. [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Ibid, p. 428. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. A concept coined by Antoine-Henri Jomini, a 19th century military thinker. It refers to a central position on one side that gives that side an advantage. By means of interior lines, it is possible to quickly move from one front to another to stop an invading army or preempt it by penetrating enemy lines. The interior lines make it possible to speed up military moves and increase the chances of surprise, critical for a nation seeking a rapid victory. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. For a description of the operation, see: Henkin, 2015, pp. 119*–*121; and: Yoash Zidon-Chato, *Bayom, balayil ba’arafel* (Hebrew) (*By Day, by Night, by Fog*), Maariv Library, Or Yehuda, 1995, pp. 223*–*227. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Cited in: Henkin, 2015, p. 120. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Henkin, 2015, pp. 121*–*122. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Golani, 1997, p. 444. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Henkin, 2015, p. 124. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Bresner, 1999, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Amos Carmel (research: Tsila Rosenblit), *Aluf hanitsahon: Assaf Simhoni* (Hebrew) (*The General of Victory: Assaf Simhoni*), Miskal, Tel Aviv, 2009, p. 314. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cited in: Golani, 1997, p. 482. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Simhoni said this in a conversation with Uzi Narkiss, then assistant to the Director of MI. Cited in: Henkin, 2015, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. See testimony of Yeshayahu Gavish, Director of Operations, General Staff, in: Bar-On (ed.), 2017, p. 330. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Golani, 1997, p. 457. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. In Yechiam Weitz’s review of *Aluf hanitsahon*, he wrote, “To a large extent, this book was written as a way for the Simhoni family to settle its account with Dayan himself and his supporters and loyalists”; “The Marshall’s Baton in His Rucksack” (Hebrew), *Haaretz*, December 15, 2009. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Carmel, 2009, pp. 322*–*327. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. See, for example, Uzi Narkiss’s testimony in: Henkin, 2015, p. 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Dayan,1966, pp. 80*–*82. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Ibid, p. 82. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Bar-On, 1991, p. 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Ekked, Operations Division, Doctrine and Training, *Tora b’sisit matkalit: Pikud ushlita* [*Basic General Staff Doctrine: Command and Control*] (Hebrew), November 2006, pp. 123*–*125. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. The approach is described in Luttwak, 2002, p. 151; discussion about attrition on pp. 151*–*166. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Dayan, 1966, p. 85. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Ben-Ari, 1998, pp. 274*–*275. [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Henkin, 2015, p. 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Golani, 1997, p. 500. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid, p. 501. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Ibid, ibid; Teveth, 1971, p. 465. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Henkin, 2015, p. 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Carmel, 2009, p. 340. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Dayan, 1996, p. 112. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Ibid, pp. 112*–*113. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Henkin, 2015, pp. 159*–*161; Golani, 1997, p. 517. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Dayan, 1966, p. 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Bar-On, 2014, p. 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid, p. 169. Many were upset by Dayan’s treatment of Simhoni and there were even some conspiracy theories according to which there had been something intentional about the death; after all, he had been en route to Ben-Gurion to explain why his conduct had been proper and how Dayan had failed. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Ibid, p. 170. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Ibid, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Ibid, p. 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Ekked, Operations Division, Doctrine and Training, *Tora b’sisit matkalit: Pikud ushlita* [*Basic General Staff Doctrine: Command and Control*] (Hebrew), November 2006, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Dayan, 1976, p. 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Dayan, 1966, p. 37. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Gazit, 2016, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Shahar, 1992, pp. 160–161. [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Amit, 1999, p. 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Narkiss, 1991, p. 182. [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. Gazit, in Bar-On (ed.), 2017, p. 174. [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. Yaakov Erez and Ilan Kfir, *Sihot eem Moshe Dayan: Ha’azinu vesha’alu* (Hebrew) [*Conversations with Moshe Dayan: Listen and Ask*], Massada, Ramat Gan, Ma’ariv Library Editions, 1981, p. 96. [↑](#footnote-ref-124)
125. Bar-On, 2014, p. 159. [↑](#footnote-ref-125)
126. Edward Luttwak and Dan Horowitz, *The Israeli Army*, Allen Lane, London, 1975, p. 146. [↑](#footnote-ref-126)
127. Ibid, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-127)
128. Dayan, 1966, p. 36. [↑](#footnote-ref-128)
129. Gen. Haim Laskov and Maj. Gen. Meir Zore’a, “Vehaya kee tetseh lemilhama” [“And it shall pass when you go forth to battle”] (Hebrew), *Maariv*, October 10, 1965, <https://bit.ly/36eROm2> [↑](#footnote-ref-129)
130. Gazit, 2016, p. 99. [↑](#footnote-ref-130)
131. Van Creveld, 2004, pp. 92–95. [↑](#footnote-ref-131)
132. V. Robert M. Citino, *The German Way of War: From the Thirty Years’ War to the Third Reich*,University Press of Kansas, 2005. [↑](#footnote-ref-132)
133. See explanation of this topic in Chapter 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-133)
134. For more on mission command, see: Shamir, 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-134)
135. Spencer Wilkinson, *The Brain of an Army: A Popular Account of the German General Staff*, Archibald Constable and Co., Westminster, 1895, p. 56. [↑](#footnote-ref-135)
136. Ekked, Operations Division, Doctrine and Training, *Tora b’sisit matkalit: Pikud ushlita* [*Basic General Staff Doctrine: Command and Control*] (Hebrew), November 2006, p. 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-136)
137. Yoav Zeitun, “Biladi: Ts’fu behatsatsa nedira babor bakirya” [“Exclusive: A large glimpse of the pit in the Kirya”] (Hebrew), *Ynet*, April 22, 2015, [https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0,7340,L -4649195,00.html](https://www.ynet.co.il/articles/0%2C7340%2CL-4649195%2C00.html) [↑](#footnote-ref-137)
138. Amit, 1999, p. 76. [↑](#footnote-ref-138)
139. Gazit, in: Bar-On (ed.), 2017, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-139)
140. Yitzhak Ben-Israel, “Torat hayehasiut shel banyan ko’ah” [“The Relativity Doctrine of Force Construction”] (Hebrew), *Ma’arakhot*, Vol. 352–353 (August 1997), pp. 33–42. [↑](#footnote-ref-140)
141. Bar-On (ed.), 2018, p. 178; the author’s interview with Dan Tolkovsky, October 10, 2017, Tel Aviv. [↑](#footnote-ref-141)
142. Bresner, 1999, p. 408. [↑](#footnote-ref-142)
143. Ibid, p. 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-143)
144. Mordechai Naor, *Laskov: Lohem, adam, haver* [*Laskov: Warrior, Human, Friend*] (Hebrew), Ministry of Defense Publications, Tel Aviv, 1988, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-144)
145. Bresner, 1999, p. 409. [↑](#footnote-ref-145)
146. Ibid, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-146)
147. Logbook of the bureau of the Chief of Staff, quoted on the Yad Lashiryon website: <https://yadlashiryon.com/armor_wars/sinai-war/> [↑](#footnote-ref-147)
148. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-148)
149. Bresner, 1999, p. 322. [↑](#footnote-ref-149)
150. For more on the debate over doctrine and the discussion at the General Staff, v.: Bresner, 1999, pp. 322–332. See also the detailed chart comparing the two approaches. [↑](#footnote-ref-150)
151. Bresner, 1999, p. 410–411. [↑](#footnote-ref-151)
152. Naor, 1988, p. 259. [↑](#footnote-ref-152)
153. Ibid, p. 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-153)
154. Bresner, 1999, p. 422. [↑](#footnote-ref-154)
155. Cited in Erez and Kfir, 1981, p. 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-155)
156. Bar-On (ed.), 2017, p. 184. [↑](#footnote-ref-156)
157. Ben-Israel, 1997. [↑](#footnote-ref-157)
158. Cited in Bresner, p. 421. [↑](#footnote-ref-158)
159. Eli Michelson, *Tahalikh halemida shel tsahal mimilhemet Sinai, november 1956—mai 1957* [*The IDF Process of Lesson Learning from the Sinai Campaign, November 1957—May 1957*] (Hebrew), PhD dissertation, Hebrew University in Jerusalem, January 2019, p. 208. [↑](#footnote-ref-159)
160. Ibid, p. 163. [↑](#footnote-ref-160)
161. Ibid, p. 226. [↑](#footnote-ref-161)
162. Ibid, p. 206. [↑](#footnote-ref-162)
163. Erez and Kfir, 1981, p. 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-163)
164. Evron, 1986, p. 145. [↑](#footnote-ref-164)
165. Yitzhak Bar-Or, 2010, p. 514. [↑](#footnote-ref-165)
166. Shlaim, p.524. [↑](#footnote-ref-166)
167. Bar-On (ed.), 2017, pp. 165, 166. [↑](#footnote-ref-167)
168. Yoav Gelber, *Hatasha: Hamilhama shenish’keha* (Hebrew) (*The Attrition: The Forgotten War*), Kinneret, Zmora Bitan, Dvir, Hevel Modiin, 2017, p. 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-168)
169. Jonathan Shimshoni, *Israel and Conventional Deterrence: Border Warfare from 1953 to 1970*, Cornell University Press, New York, Ithaca, 1988. Brig. Gen. (res.) Yoni Shimshoni, served as the Director of Strategic Planning division in the IDF. [↑](#footnote-ref-169)
170. Moshe Dayan, “Sinai: Ten Years Later” (Hebrew), *Maarakhot*, Issue 306–307 (January 1987, originally published in *Ma'ariv* 11 November 1966); the citation is from 1962. [↑](#footnote-ref-170)
171. Ibid, pp. 62*–*63. [↑](#footnote-ref-171)
172. Shimon Shamir in an interview in: Evron, 1986, p. 181. This opinion was unequivocally voiced also by others, such as journalist Uri Avnery and Moshe Sneh. See Sneh’s statements at the end of the Sinai Campaign: <https://mekomit.co.il/%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%AA-%D7%A1%D7%99%D7%A0%D7%99/>; see also: Amit, 1999, p. 79. [↑](#footnote-ref-172)
173. Henkin, 2015, p. 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-173)
174. Bar-On, 2014, p. 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-174)
175. Ibid, p. 184. This would not be their last meeting. Dayan saw Monty again before his trip to Vietnam in 1966. [↑](#footnote-ref-175)
176. Mordechai Naor, *Laskov: Lohem, adam, haver* (Hebrew) (*Laskov: Fighter, Human, Friend*), Defense Ministry Publications, Tel Aviv, 1988, p. 273. [↑](#footnote-ref-176)
177. Ibid, p. 277. [↑](#footnote-ref-177)
178. Mordechai Naor, *Laskov: Lohem, adam, haver* (Hebrew) (*Laskov: Fighter, Human, Friend*), Defense Ministry Publications, Tel Aviv, 1988, p. 325. [↑](#footnote-ref-178)
179. Ben-Gurion’s letter of farewell, in: Dayan, 1976, pp. 374*–*376. [↑](#footnote-ref-179)
180. Shashar, 1992. pp. 160*–*161. [↑](#footnote-ref-180)
181. Ibid, p. 376. [↑](#footnote-ref-181)