Why Israel Prevailed
By HANSON W. BALDWIN
New York Times (1857-Current file); Jun 8, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The New York Times (1851 - 2002)
pg. 16

Why Israel Prevailed

Her Spirit and Modern Organization Are Contrasted With Arab Feudalism

By HANSON W. BALDWIN

The Arab defeat in one of the quickest wars in history became a debacle yesterday.

The Israelis announced—and there were no persuasive denials—that they had conquered most of the Jordanian territory on the west bank of the Jordan River, and that they had captured much of the Jordanian Army together with an Iraqui brigade. They said their airborne and amphibious forces had taken Sharm el Sheik, which is at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula and dominates the Strait of Tiran.

News Analysis

They also said they had routed the Egyptian forces in Sinai. In 72 hours, Israeli forces reached the Suez Canal, and Israeli planes were roaming the skies at will.

Just as the United Nations Security Council set an hour for the implementation of its cease-fire resolution, Israel had apparently accomplished her major objectives—the capture of old Jerusalem and adjoining areas, control of the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, the defeat of the Egyptians and the humbling of President Gamal Abdel Nasser.

The extent of the losses suffered in the short sharp fighting was uncertain. Most of the combat elements of Arab—particularly Egyptian—air power appear to have been wiped out.

Many Units Uncommitted

But many of the more than 2,000 tanks and self-propelled guns used by the principal Arab armies do not appear to have been engaged at all, and apparently the majority of the six to seven Egyptian divisions were not even in Sinai.

President Nasser appears to have retained these troops to maintain his precarious foothold in Yemen, to perform internal security duties in Egypt and to provide a reserve for the defense of the Suez Canal and of Egypt proper.

Most Western military observers had expected the Israeli victory, but many of them were surprised by the speed and sweeping nature of the triumph. Soviet intelligence, it was noted, apparently badly miscalculated Egyptian capabilities.

In the current campaign, Sharm el Sheik was taken on the third day of war. In 1956, it was taken on the eighth day.

Israeli forces in 1956 reached a point 10 miles from the Suez Canal, where they halted, on the fifth day. Yesterday, on the third day of this campaign, the Israeli spearhead reached the canal.

The explanation for the rapid Israeli triumph is to be found, observers noted, in the structure, organization and spirit of the combatant countries and of their armies.

Israel is a relatively modern, one-class state. The Arab nations are still essentially feudalistic in social structure.

Since the vaunted superiority in numbers of the Arab armies was never brought to bear on the fighting fronts, Israel probably had an over-all numerical superiority in the troops actually involved and a clear-cut superiority in firepower and mobility in the actual battles.

Israel had a great will to fight and an offensive spirit. The Arabs, as nations, lack this.

Israel won the opening air battle with heavy and successful air strikes against Arab airfields. Even if Arab ground opposition had been heavier and more skilled than it was, in time this Israeli advantage in the air would have been decisive.

The Israeli air chief of staff said yesterday that "we virtually destroyed the Egyptian airforce in three hours." In the three days of fighting, he said, the Arab air losses included 145 MIG-21's, 105 MIG-17's and 27 MIG-19's in addition to other types. He mentioned a few more MIG-21's than had been credited by most estimates as available in the area.

Washington sources suggested that the rapid success of the Israeli air strikes might have stemmed from two factors. One is the well known dislike of Egyptian fighter pilots for night operation; the Israeli raids came in at and just before dawn.

The informants also suggested that the Israelis might have discovered gaps in the Arab radar coverage and that they exploited these in their approaches.

Maj. Gen. Moshe Dayan, Israeli chief of staff in the 1956 Sinai campaign and now Minister of Defense, noted in his recently published book "Diary of the Sinai Campaign" some of the Egyptian strengths and weaknesses of a decade ago—strengths and weaknesses that exist also today.

When the Israelis captured Sharm el Sheik in 1956, the "decisive element which brought about the speedy collapse of the enemy was the Air Force," he noted.

"The Egyptians had neither effective weapons nor the spirit to withstand the air attacks," General Dayan added.

The second great weakness of the Egyptians is their apparent inability to fight mobile warfare or to conduct cohesive advances and retreats. In 1956, as today, withdrawals that started in orderly fashion turned into confused retreats, and then, as General Dayan noted, into "panic flights."

General Dayan wrote that in desert terrain, "there is no alternative to armor, aircraft, paratroopers and motorized infantry."

The Egyptians had then—and have today—all these elements of military power, but they lack the essential elements of command and control, of how to utilize and maneuver a mobile force of combined arms to apply superior power at a decisive point.

As for the Jordanian army, a vaunted one in Arab countries, it was outnumbered and outfought. The old Arab Legion under British advisers was, man for man, a fine army. But since the withdrawal of the British, the ranks of its Bedouin tribesmen had been diluted by Palestinians, political officers had been appointed, and its effectiveness had declined.

The greatest weakness in all the Arab armies, observers noted, is in their officer leadership.

An officer's commission is often regarded in the Arab states as a position of privilege, rather than one of responsibility, and there is little sense of leadership and of loyalty down to the troops in the ranks.

Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.