Deception Arab-Israeli Wars

Deception has been and remains a decisive and powerful instrument to the outcome of manoeuvrable operations. The case studies which I have chosen to research and analyse to support this view are focused on the Arab-Israeli conflicts between 1956 and 1973. Principally the 1956 Suez Crisis and the 1973 Yom Kippur War. As I will show how deception was successfully utilized by each side.

The first such instance of successful use of deception and strategic counterintelligence was during the 1956 Suez crisis. It is vital to give context to the events leading up to the crisis and the complexity of international relations that required deception, deceit and cunningness to enable the operation to go ahead.

The Suez Canal was once described as the ‘jugular vein of Empire’. The canals one-hundred-and-twenty-mile length enabled the distance vessels would have to navigate to be reduced by many thousands of miles. As it enabled vessels to navigate between Europe and Asia without circumnavigating the horn of Africa.

It was operated and owned by the Suez Canal company which was formed by predominantly European shareholders and at the time 44 per cent owned by government. The Suez Canal was a pivotal link to its Empire, with 80% of all ships using the canal being. Therefore, control of the canal was a major strategic concern and later proved as a factor resulting Suez crisis in 1956.

The remained in Egypt as a de facto protectorate long after the 1922 Egyptian independence. Though, by 1947 withdrew to the canal zone, with the intention to remain there under the authority of the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian treaty which would allow troops stationed there in defence of the Suez Canal.

The Free Officers Movement blamed the King Farouk of Egypt for agreeing to this treaty. They were further angered for his failure to prevent the creation of the Zionist state of Israel. Placing much of the blame for the embarrassing defeat of Egyptian armed forces throughout the Arab-Israeli fromring 1948 until 1949. This movement was lead by Colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser, who successfully deposed king Farouk in 1952. The newly imposed President detailed that he formed the notion of the revolution while he served as a Major in the 6th Infantry Battalion. During the Arab-Israeli War in 1949. He was present during the several unsuccessful attacks on Israeli positions in the area of Khirbet Mahaz in the Negev region. (reference page book)

The United States of America would later refuse to further arm President Nasser due to fears that they would be used against the newly formed state of Israel, which many in America had close affiliation with. However, unbeknown to the US Government the Israeli Defence Force would carry out a raid on Egyptian controlled Gaza in February of 1955. This resulted in the killing of 38 Egyptian soldiers, which led President Nasser to turn eastwards to strengthen his Armed Forces, by signing a significant arms deal with communist Czechoslovakia. The US government on the 19th of July 1956 reacted to this agreement by withdrawing financial aid for the Aswan Dam project on the Nile River. President Nasser as a consequence took the divisive decision to the nationalisation of the Suez Canal Company on 26 July 1956. Stating that

‘Tonight, our Egyptian canal will be run by Egyptians’ - Gamal Abdel Nasser.

This would result in one greatest successful use of deception in international history. The Protocol of Sèvres was a secret agreement reached between the governments of the United Kingdom, France and Israel held secretly at Sèvres, France between the 22nd and 24th of October 1956. Its primary purpose was to depose President Nasser and regain control of the Suez Canal. 114

The plan was known as Operation Musketeer, it was entirely dependent on the use of strategic counterintelligence and deception. The first step of the approach would see Israel strike the Egyptian Sinai on 29th October with their paratroopers jumping into the region. This strike seized the eastern entrance of the Mitla Pass, this was strategically important as it would allow the ensuing ground invasion by the IDF. Israeli forces would then advance along three routes; along the Mediterranean coast, The Bir Gafgafa Mitla pass itself and towards the southernmost end of the Suez Canal. This would essentially enable Israel to gain controlled of the area surrounding west Suez Canal.

The Prime minister of Israel, David Ben-Gurion was concerned that they would appear to the international community as an antagonist. However, prior publicity given to attacks carried out by Palestinian militants and the ongoing Egyptian blockade of Israeli shipping aided in the plausibility of the attacks and assisted the overall deception. Israel successfully convinced the United Nations that they were acting in self defence. Stating that raids were being carried out by Palestinian Fedayeen on Israel launched from Egyptian controlled Sinai and Gaza.

However, this was later found to be disingenuous as there were no known bases in the Egyptian Sinai.

This would then serve the next step in Protocol of Sèvres, which was to provided justification and foundations for the diplomatic intervention by Britain and France, under the guise of the 1888 convention and 1954 withdrawal agreement. These agreements enabled the defence Suez Canal if any threat posed to its operation, even by the fabricated threat posed by the Israeli forces to the Suez.

The and French delivered an ultimatum to both parties involved Egypt and Israel. Demanding the immediate withdrawal of their forces from the ten-mile Suez zone which encompassed both sides of the canal. With the Israel, Britain and France complicit in the deception. Israel as planned in the cunning deception agreed to the demands as planned. As anticipated Egypt refused to do so which lead to the third step Protocol of Sèvres, military intervention by Anglo-French forces.

On 31st of October their aircraft began to carry out airstrikes upon Egyptian airfields, anti-aircraft positions and other military infrastructure. This was swiftly followed by Paratrooper’s landing on the airfields of El Gamil and decisive strike on Er Wasra on the 5th of November. Haste proved vital in order to maintain the element of surprise of subsequent naval advance towards Port Said and the imminent beach landings carried out by the Commando brigade on the 6th of November.

Although many in the international community would later suspect collaboration between Israel, Britain and France. They were unable to categorically verify it. It was not until details were

published

The use deception proved pivotal to Operation Musketeers success. It enabled all parties that were in complicit to achieve their individual goals.

The second case study which I believe demonstrates the successful use of deception to the outcome manoeuvre operations was in the weeks leading to the 6th of October 1973. This would date would symbolize the start of the Yom Kippur War to Israeli's or the Ramadan war to the Arabs. 174The origins of which trace directly back to the Six-day war in June 1967, which resulted in a resounding defeat of Arab forces.

Many in the international community question whether this was a successful use of a deception or merely grand failure of the Israeli intelligence services.

The Egyptians used misinformation, denial and deception to ensure a high level of certainty to the initial outcome in the conflict. However, this would be further enhanced by Israeli Intelligence services whose inflexibility to differing views, coupled with bureaucratic antagonism would lend itself effortlessly to the Egyptians plan.

Mossad, Modin, Shabak and Shin Bet the Israeli intelligence services, would all exhibit resistance to change primarily in doctrine. In addition, stagnation of personnel in key positions would further diminish their effectiveness. This was particularly evident when evaluating the threat posed by their surrounding hostile Arab neighbours. Israel's hierarchy were of consensus that an Arab attack was not likely. This assumption was based on the relatively quick defeat of Arab forces in the Six-day war in 1967.

Major General Eli Zeira the Chief of Military Intelligence in an interview prior to the conflict stated - 'I discount the likelihood of a conventional Arab attack. The biggest problem Israeli intelligence faces is to underestimate what we're up against, but an equally big risk is that we would overestimate (and thus over-react). They (Arab leadership) have their own logic. Thus, we have to look hard for evidence of their real intentions in the field. Otherwise, with the Arabs, all you have is rhetoric. Too many Arab leaders have intentions which far exceed their capabilities.'

This was further supported by the view point that as Egypt was unlikely to carry out such an attack until 1975 as they did not possess adequate numbers of bomber squadrons and medium fighter bombers. Aircraft such as the Jaguar, Phantom and MiG-23; which were capable of striking Israeli airfields.

However, President Sadat of Egypt realised that this would be a deciding factor if this operation was to be a success. Therefore, he would request an alternative to neutralise the Israeli air superiority. This was provided by the Soviets in the form of a missile umbrella of various types of SAM ground-to-air-missile systems. This would be additionally be supported by Soviet SCUD surface-to-surface missiles capable of threatening populated area in Israel itself. (page 227 – The arab Isreali wars) 176

The Egyptians would also bring the Syrians into the deception plan, convincing President Assad to join in the simultaneous attack on Israel. Creating a two front offensive code named Operation Badr

The Egyptian masterful deception plan was conceived to encourage Israeli misconceptions. The misinformation campaign would utilise foreign journalists to publish articles indicating that their equipment was poorly maintained and that they were simply not ready for a conflict. They would successful convince many governments in the West of this also. 228

The Egyptians government attempted to plan for every eventuality, including from a political stand point. They requested the Soviet Union to bring about a ceasefire through the UN if the war going badly. Likewise prevent any interference if the opposite was true. 229

The deception would go further as the date the war would be initiated was chosen due to two main factors. Firstly, it coincided with Yom Kippur Day which is the Jewish day of atonement. Additionally, it would provide the necessary tides to cross the Suez Canal.

The next stage to the deception and misinformation campaign was the high frequency of military posturing an escalation of political rhetoric in by the Egyptians along the border and followed shortly by de-escalation. This was occurred routinely particularly in the years prior to the 6th of October 1973 attack. This again would feed the Israeli misconceptions that an attack was unlikely. However, It important to acknowledge that Israel was aware of the increased troop movements near their border. However, military intelligence agencies both Israeli and international refused to recognise that these were more than mere military exercises. Many believed that forces on Syrian border in the Golan Heights were to be expected. As recent conflict with Syria had resulted in thirteen aircraft being shot down over the Mediterranean in mid-September. 229

Fortunately, there were those in Israeli hierarchy such General Elazar the Chief of Staff, who obtained permission to increase the alert status and readiness of the IDF, on the 5th of October, hours before the strike was to take place. 230

Although Israel were initially, caught by surprise, the IDF through sheer fortitude and with the real threat to their existence, were able to regain the upper hand. By the 25th of October 1973 Israel decisively defeated both Arab forces.

References

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