



ON: The 1973 Yom Kippur War

The three “Nos” of Khartoum

Immediately after the 1967 Six Day War, Israel offered Syria, Jordan and Egypt the return of captured territories in exchange for full peace. The offer was refused.

In August and September of 1967, the Arab states held a summit in Khartoum, Sudan where they adopted a position vis-à-vis Israel that became known as the "Three No's of Khartoum":

- **NO** peace with Israel.
- **NO** recognition of Israel.
- **NO** negotiations with Israel.

Not surprisingly, against the background of Khartoum, Israel's diplomatic feelers to Egypt failed to spur negotiations. Instead, between 1967 and 1973, the Israeli and Egyptian militaries engaged in many small skirmishes.

At the same time, Palestinian terrorists, led by Yassir Arafat, began to play a major role in the Middle East conflict. The greatest concentration ever of Palestinian terrorist actions outside of Israel occurred between 1970 and 1973; they were directed against both Israeli and Jordanian targets abroad.

Preparing for War

Both Syria and Egypt spent the early 1970s preparing for war. In 1972 and early 1973, Egypt's military chief of staff visited fourteen Arab capitals to ask for money, weapons, and personnel for use in a war against Israel. All of the Arab states responded generously.

Egyptian President Sadat threatened war publicly in 1971 and 1972, declaring his willingness to lose one million men in the pursuit of Israel's destruction. When Sadat failed to act immediately on his threats, Israel was lulled into complacency.

The Attack

Egypt and Syria attacked Israel on October 6, 1973, on the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, the holiest day on the Jewish calendar. The Arab states chose the date because they knew that most Israeli soldiers would be on leave and that Israel's radio and TV stations would be off the air, making mass mobilization difficult.

At the start of the war, Israel's enemies amassed the equivalent of the total forces of NATO on Israel's borders. On the Golan Heights, approximately 180 Israeli tanks faced an onslaught of 1400 Syrian tanks. Along the Suez Canal, 80,000 Egyptians attacked less than 500 Israeli defenders.

During the first two days of war, Israel was on the defensive. Israel then succeeded in fully mobilizing its reserves and eventually repelled the invading armies.

Aftermath

The October 23, 1973 ceasefire essentially left the 1967 armistice lines and boundaries intact. The Arab armies had failed to achieve any significant territorial gains. Despite its military victory, the Israeli government appointed a high level commission to investigate the functioning of the intelligence services before the war and the army's preparedness. The commission's report reproached the intelligence branch for overconfidence, false assumptions and missed signals, and the anger of the Israeli public forced the resignation of the government of Golda Meir.

In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, Anwar Sadat came to the realization that defeating Israel militarily was impossible. Sadat's foresight ultimately led to the negotiations that produced the Camp David Peace Treaty between Israel and Egypt in 1979.