

ARMS TRANSFERS AND ESCALATION IN REGIONAL WARS: THE ISRAELI-
EGYPTIAN WAR OF ATTRITION (1967-1970)

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I. INTRODUCTION

What is the relationship between weapons transfers and escalation in regional wars? Which kinds of weapons make escalation more likely? Which kinds make de-escalation more likely? Under what conditions? Understanding the answers to these questions is the key stronger states can use to control escalation in regional wars. US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger once said of negotiating with Israel, “I ask [Prime Minister] Rabin to make concessions, and he says he can't because Israel is weak. So I give him more arms, and then he says he doesn't need to make concessions because Israel is strong.”¹ Understanding how escalation works is critical for policymakers interested in containing or ending conflicts like the recent Israel’s recent wars in Gaza and Lebanon, the ongoing war in Ukraine, or potential future wars between Israel and Iran, China and Taiwan, or India and Pakistan. This study analyzes four cases of decisions regarding escalation in the Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition (1967-1970) and proposes a new theory of escalation – Threats-Capabilities Theory.² This theory proposes that transfers of offensive

¹ This context of the quote is regarding negotiations for a peace settlement, not escalation. However, the quote makes sense in the context of escalation as well. Edward Sheehan. *The Arabs, Israelis, and Kissinger: A Secret History of American Diplomacy in the Middle East*. (New York: Reader’s Digest Press, 1976), 199.

² This theory is intended to be generalizable. More research is needed to test this theory. To that end, four wars have been identified that contain cases that could possibly provide support for hypotheses proposed in this theory. These cases may also be good tests for the theory. First, the Chadian-Libyan War. From 1978-1987, Libya launched several incursions into Chad. The Soviet Union did not want Libya to continue to escalate, but at several points it provided weapons to Libya that it used to escalate the conflict. See John Wright, *Libya, Chad and the Central Sahara* (Totowa (N.J.): Barnes & Noble books, 1989), 126-148; Central Intelligence Agency, *Soviet Reaction to Libya’s Venture in Chad*, 1987, <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP90T00114R000800330001-4.pdf>. The second is the Iran-Iraq war. Several cases within this war could be used to test the theory, but the 1984 “Tanker War” provides a clear example. French-supplied *Super Etendard* fighters enabled Iraq to escalate its attacks on Iranian oil tankers. Despite threatening to close the Strait of Hormuz if Iraq did so, Iran did not retaliate significantly to the Iraqi escalation for several months. Here we have a case of escalation possibly being caused by the provision of arms, and a decision on Iran’s behalf to not escalate because of the capabilities of those arms. See Efrayim Karsh, *The Iran-Iraq War: A Military Analysis*, Adelphi Papers 220 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1987), 28-30. A third case is one of de-escalation from the Rhodesian Civil War. The Zimbabwe African National Union (ZANU) was supported by China and the USSR, as well as Tanzania, Mozambique, and Zambia. All these foreign backers had begun to back out by 1979, which contributed to ZANU’s agreement to a ceasefire in the war. Matthew Preston, *Ending Civil War: Rhodesia and Lebanon in Perspective*, International Library of War Studies 2 (London New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 2004), 158-164. The fourth case is one that can be used to test the limits of the theory: the 1982 Israel-Lebanon War. In this war, the US attempted but largely failed to use arms transfers as leverage. The main reason for the failure appears to be that the balance of power was so tilted in Israel’s

weapons to a state during a war makes it more likely for that state to escalate, even when the threat to it remains the same. Threats themselves also play a very important role in decisions about escalation but can sometimes take a back seat to capabilities. Thus, if states can supply defensive weapons to their allies that can help those states deal with threats, wars can de-escalate, and peace can be achieved.

This introduction contains an overview of the theory, a working concept of escalation, and a review of the literature on escalation and the literature on large states using their power to influence their smaller allies. Then it explains the case study method and why it has been selected. It concludes with a general overview of the War of Attrition and a summary of the findings of the study. The next four sections are two case studies of escalation, one of de-escalation, and one of non-escalation in the War of Attrition. The final section offers conclusions and policy implications.

A. Threats-Capabilities Theory

Threats-capabilities theory holds that the escalation strategy that a state adopts will be based on the threats it faces and the military capabilities of both parties to the conflict. If the only way to deal with a threat is to escalate, states will do so. However, even when this is true, states will be constrained in their escalation by their capabilities - specifically, they will seek to avoid high costs or high losses when possible. States may also escalate without an increase in threat, simply because they could gain *some* conceivable advantage from it and they have the capability to do so. The main implication of this theory is that the provision of certain military capabilities

favor that withholding of arms that only marginally impacted Israel's overall strength was not enough to prevent the escalation of the war. However, it was enough to convince Israel to halt strategic bombing of Beirut. See Nitza Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms, Leverage and Peace in the Middle East*, Contributions in Military Studies 83 (New York Westport (Conn.) London: Greenwood press, 1988), 125-157.

from large powers to smaller ones has a great deal of impact on the escalation strategy the smaller state pursues. When new capabilities are provided that make escalation easier or less costly, escalation will be more likely. The opposite is true as well. When new capabilities are introduced that increase the costs or expected losses at the current level of fighting (for example, a new air defense system), de-escalation is more likely. Therefore, providing offensive or dual-use weapons to a state at war can cause escalation. This study serves as a plausibility probe into the theory, or an initial test to see if the theory has some explanatory power.

Threats-capabilities theory yields testable hypotheses. This study demonstrates these hypotheses in cases within the War of Attrition to illustrate how the theory works. The hypotheses proposed are summarized in table 1 and will be discussed below.

The first hypothesis is that when the perceived threat to a state increases, it is more likely to escalate. This hypothesis is found in much of the literature on escalation, and the logic is simple. However, threats-capabilities theory proposes that there are other factors that can amplify this effect. First, when a state's defensive capability is lower it is more likely to escalate. Imagine an army is marching towards a defensive position – if that position can be defended without attacking, that option would be preferred. However, if the defenses are relatively weak, the defending side may be forced to go on the attack. This is a similar logic to the security dilemma. Second, when a state's own offensive capability is higher, it is more likely to escalate. This ties in with the third, that such an escalation is likely to be at a higher level the greater the offensive capability. This could be because of organizational dynamics (i.e. militaries feel more comfortable escalating when they have a greater capability) or simple rational choice theory (i.e. if a state is escalating to defend itself, or course it will do so to the best of its ability).

The second hypothesis is that an increase of offensive capability during a war will increase the likelihood of escalation. This hypothesis is derived from organization theory. During wars, militaries are normally very independent from civilian authority. An increase in offensive capability allows militaries to better implement offensive doctrines. Militaries will be sensible to losses and will not want to go on the offense if it means inviting catastrophe, but if their relative offensive capability increases, they will be more likely to escalate. The third hypothesis has a similar logic – a state is likely to de-escalate when the other side’s defensive capability increases.

<u>Table 1 – Hypotheses Derived from Threats-Capabilities Theory</u>
1. When the perceived threat to a state increases, the state is more likely to escalate.
a. Escalation is more likely when the threatened state’s defensive capability is lower.
b. Escalation is more likely when the threatened state’s offensive capability is higher.
c. When a state’s offensive capability is higher, that state is more likely to escalate to a higher level.
2. When a state’s offensive capability increases during a war, that state is more likely to escalate.
3. When a state’s defensive capability increases during a war, the state on the other side of the conflict is more likely to de-escalate.
4. A state is less likely to escalate when it has the capability to defend against an enemy attack.

B. Framework for the Study of Escalation

This section provides a brief history of the concept escalation, and a working concept for this study that is widely recognized in the literature. Escalation is a term that was first used in security studies in the mid-20th century, though the concept it describes has existed for

centuries.³ Several scholars have developed the concept and created definitions of the term as it relates to international politics. This study focuses on escalation in wars, but escalation has also been studied in international relations in contexts outside of war including arms races⁴ and crisis decision-making.⁵ For the purposes of this study, the best definition comes from Richard Smoke in his 1977 book: “escalation is an action that crosses a saliency which defines the current limits of a war, and occurs in a context where the actor cannot know the full consequences of his actions.”⁶ A saliency can be either geographic (i.e. Caesar crossing the Rubicon) or a qualitative/quantitative increase within established geographic lines (i.e. the American decision to bomb Vietnam). Smoke described two broad “images” of escalation, which have their own implicit model - the phenomenal model and the actor model. Under the phenomenal model,

³ The word “escalation” is derived from the escalator, or moving staircase, which was introduced at the turn of the century. The metaphor began to be used in fiction, contract law, and eventually international relations. The first recorded use of the term as referring to an increase in the level of hostility in a war comes from a 1959 argument by Wayland Young, although Young states that the term was already in use. Lawrence Freedman. “On the Tiger’s Back: The Development of the Concept of Escalation.” In *The Logic of Nuclear Terror*, edited by Roman Kolkowicz (United Kingdom: Allen and Unwin, 1987), 109–152, 114-115.

⁴ Much of the literature on escalation and arms races also focuses on arms races as a cause of war. For examples of the literature, see Susan G. Sample, “Arms Races and Dispute Escalation: Resolving the Debate,” *Journal of Peace Research* 34, no. 1 (February 1997): 7–22, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343397034001002>; Toby J Rider, Michael G Findley, and Paul F Diehl, “Just Part of the Game? Arms Races, Rivalry, and War,” *Journal of Peace Research* 48, no. 1 (January 2011): 85–100, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343310389505>; Michael D. Wallace, “Arms Races and Escalation: Some New Evidence,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 23, no. 1 (March 1979): 3–16, <https://doi.org/10.1177/002200277902300101>; Lewis F. Richardson, “Arms and insecurity: A mathematical study of the causes and origins of war,” (Pittsburgh: Boxwood Press, 1960).

⁵ Literature that focuses on crisis decision-making is often related to the literature on deterrence - i.e. it is trying to determine when deterrence will fail in a crisis. For examples, see Frank C. Zagare, “NATO, Rational Escalation and Flexible Response,” *Journal of Peace Research* 29, no. 4 (November 1992): 435–54, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343392029004006>; Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, 8. print (Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1981); Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); James D. Fearon, “Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes,” *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (September 1994): 577–92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2944796>; Lisa J. Carlson, “A Theory of Escalation and International Conflict,” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, no. 3 (September 1995): 511-534,

⁶ Smoke noted that cases in which an actor could know the full consequences of their actions can also be considered escalation. However, they are “rare and analytically uninteresting.” Richard Smoke, *War: Controlling Escalation* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 35. Smoke based his definition of saliency on Thomas Schelling’s writings on limited war. According to Schelling, a saliency must have two features - being objective (i.e. noticeable by all parties) and discrete or discontinuous. Additionally, steps do not have to be significant to cross saliencies. Oftentimes actors in international politics will engage in “salami slicing tactics” by making several small moves that together accomplish a much bigger goal. Smoke, *War*, 32.

escalation is a phenomenon that occurs in war often – that is, wars naturally escalate but don't naturally de-escalate. Under the actor model, escalation is a result of a deliberate decision made by one party.⁷ These models are not contradictory - to understand escalation and de-escalation as phenomena, it is necessary to understand why actors make the decision to escalate when they do.

This study adopts Smoke's definition of escalation as a crossing of a geographical or otherwise objective and discrete salient. In none of the cases of escalation in this study could either side have known the exact response of the other side. This study does not adopt either of the models that Smoke describes. It does not assume that war has a natural tendency to escalate.⁸ Though that may be true, this study seeks to understand when actors will escalate, and when they will de-escalate, and the circumstances under which each outcome is more likely.

Escalation is not inherently offensive or defensive. For example, a state could escalate by starting a new offensive that is meant to end a war or reduce the threat to itself. It could also escalate by acquiring a new weapon meant to stop a threat, like an air defense system. Sometimes, defensive and offensive escalation can occur at the same time or be indistinguishable from one another. For example, during the War of Attrition Egypt acquired a Soviet air defense system that was directly aimed at halting Israeli bombing but would also serve as a crucial part of an offensive, which was being planned, to cross the Suez Canal.

C. Literature Review

⁷ Smoke, *War*, 21-23.

⁸ Smoke's model does assume that, for five main reasons. The desire to win the war, the desire to not lose the war, the inherent "raising of the stakes" of the war, the personal psychology and interests of high-level decision makers, and the tactical requirements of war. Ibid, 23-26. The necessity of escalation to win a war has also been explored by Fred Charles Ikle. Ikle argues that escalation with the goal of ending a war can actually "cut both ways" - it may create a desire to end the war, but it may also prompt a spiral into further war. Thus, it is not obvious that escalation is *required* in all cases to win wars. Fred Charles Iklé, "Peace Through Escalation?" in *Every War Must End*, Rev. ed (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 38-58.

This study draws on three categories of existing literature - the literature on conflict escalation, the literature on the causes of war that may shed light on escalation, and the literature on powerful states shaping the positions of less powerful allies (so-called “alliance restraint”). This study is situated most directly in the first category. Previous studies on escalation mostly focus on great power war (especially the potential for nuclear war) and/or crisis decision-making and usually use highly theoretical methods or large-N analysis⁹. There have been few case studies of escalation, and even fewer case studies of escalation in an existing war.¹⁰ Additionally, few studies have attempted to posit general theories of why escalation occurs in wars, or to compare competing explanations. Scholars have acknowledged that theories about the causes of war could also explain escalations within a war. Examples of such theories include the security dilemma, the fog of war, and the organizational interests of militaries.¹¹ However, these theories have not been rigorously tested in the context of escalation. The literature on alliance restraint has touched on escalation, and on arms transfers generally, but has mostly focused on the general problem large states have of getting their allies to “behave” and not on specific ways larger states can achieve this goal .

⁹ More is said about the problems of large-N analysis of escalation in the “Methods and Case Selection” segment.

¹⁰ The few case studies that do exist include Smoke, *War*; Philip A. G. Sabin and Efraim Karsh, “Escalation in the Iran-Iraq War,” *Survival* 31, no. 3 (May 1989): 241–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00396338908442469>; Dwi Impiani, “Escalation of Military Conflict Between India and Pakistan in The Post Lahore Declaration (1999 – 2019): Security Dilemma Perspective,” *Global: Jurnal Politik Internasional* 21, no. 2 (December 26, 2019): 219, <https://doi.org/10.7454/global.v21i2.403>; J. Matthew McInnis and Ashton Gilmore, “Escalation and De-Escalation in Conflict,” *Iran at War* (American Enterprise Institute, 2016), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep03265.7>; Kaplan, Morgan L. “Foreign Support, Miscalculation, and Conflict Escalation: Iraqi Kurdish Self-Determination in Perspective.” *Ethnopolitics* 18, no. 1 (2019): 29–45. doi:10.1080/17449057.2018.1525164; Nikolas Emmanuel, “External Incentives and Conflict De-Escalation: Negotiating a settlement to Sudan’s North-South Civil War,” in *Resolving International Conflict: Dynamics of Escalation, Continuation and Transformation*, ed. Isabel Bramsen, Paul Poder, and Ole Weaver (New York: Routledge, 2019), 181-199.

¹¹ See Barry Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation: Conventional War and Nuclear Risks*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 1991), 12-23.

One of the most influential scholars in the literature on escalation is Thomas Schelling, though he rarely used the term.¹² Schelling described how states can use the threat of escalation in the bargaining process. Sometimes, it is necessary to escalate once to demonstrate that the threat of doing so again, or to escalate further, is credible. As he says, “if all threats were fully believable... we might live in a strange world, perhaps a safe one.”¹³ Schelling was particularly concerned at the possibility of a limited nuclear exchange between the US and USSR, as is much of the other foundational literature on escalation. Herman Kahn developed the metaphor of the “escalation ladder” with 44 distinct “rungs” ranging from an ostensible crisis to a “spasm or insensate war.”¹⁴ Because these studies focus on great power conflict, and especially nuclear war, they do not provide a great amount of detail about how a smaller state would be able to use escalation in the bargaining process. In regional contexts, the actual capability to carry out an escalation is often in doubt (i.e. the US can shoot a missile at the USSR and be reasonably sure it will hit its target, but an Israeli plane may not always be able to safely bomb Cairo). Lisa Carlson, attempting to create a “general theory of escalation” using formal modeling, argues that actors with low cost-tolerance will tend to escalate at high levels early in a conflict as a means of

¹² Schelling wrote two influential books that include the concept, *The Strategy of Conflict* (1960) and *Arms and Influence* (1966). The former does not use the word escalation at all. However, it discusses intimately the concept of limited war. For Schelling, limits often emerge in a war through “tacit bargaining,” which he discusses in Chapter 3 of *Strategy of Conflict*. In chapter 10, he discusses “the threat that leaves something to chance,” or a threat to increase the odds of a war breaking out that would be costly to both sides (or, in other terms, to escalate). See Thomas C. Schelling, *The Strategy of Conflict*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 53-80; 187-204. He expands on this in *Arms and Influence*, calling the concept the manipulation of risk. He uses the word escalation once in this book. Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966; reis. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008); 92-125.

¹³ Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (1966; reis. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 92.

¹⁴ Herman Kahn, *On Escalation: Metaphors and Scenarios* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986), 37-51. Kahn's 44 rungs are divided into 7 categories, each with a “firebreak” between them. A firebreak is a clear salient boundary, such as “no nuclear use” or “city targeting.” A table of all these rungs can be found at Kahn, *On Escalation*, 39.

bluffing that they are more willing to suffer the costs of escalation.¹⁵ Carlson's theory is far from general, as it focuses too much on the outset of a war and does not take into account factors that can change within one – such as the acquisition of new capabilities. Carlson's theory would not predict wars like the War of Attrition, where conflict has gone on for a long period of time without significant escalation and neither party began the conflict at the highest level of escalation they would achieve.

There is also a great deal of literature on deterrence. Some states may avoid wars, or keep wars limited, because either 1) they do not believe it possible to achieve their goals by escalating (deterrence by denial) or 2) the potential target has the capability to retaliate in a way that harms the state that escalated (deterrence by punishment). In the nuclear world, because strategic missile defense is not possible, deterrence by punishment has been dominant.¹⁶ In the world of limited or regional wars, more considerations arise. First, denial becomes more possible and punishment less possible, as regional powers tend to have more limited power projection capability, and air defenses are much more effective against planes than against missiles. Additionally, smaller states are under greater pressure to conserve power resources to prepare for the possibility that another threat arises.¹⁷ John Mearsheimer succinctly describes the most important variables: “deterrence...is most likely to obtain when an attacker believes that his probability of success is low and that the attendant costs will be high.”¹⁸ Under this theory, a

¹⁵ Carlson, Lisa J. “A Theory of Escalation and International Conflict.” *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 39, no. 3 (1995): 511–534. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/174579>.

¹⁶ Even if strategic missile defense were technologically possible to achieve, it would be much harder to keep stable. Stephen Van Evera argued that a world of missile defense “despite its defensive look, is an offense-dominant world.” Stephen Van Evera, *The Causes of War*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 251. For an early and deep look at nuclear deterrence by punishment, see Bernard Brodie, *Strategy in the Missile Age* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1959), 264-304.

¹⁷ Ikle, *Every War Must End*, 40.

¹⁸ John J. Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 23.

change in technology in the middle of a war could lead to escalation if it increases the probability of success or decreases the costs an escalating state would suffer.

Some other studies have examined the effects of state, societal, and individual level variables on escalation.¹⁹ Most of these do not come to very strong conclusions, and most are focused on crises or disputes and not on escalation in existing wars. For example, some studies within the democratic peace literature have posited that disputes between democracies are less likely to escalate, or that democracies are able to more credibly threaten escalation in negotiations.²⁰ Other studies have focused on individual and group psychology. The individual level arguments, most notably examined by Robert Jervis, are that certain cognitive biases make escalation seem like a better option for leaders.²¹ Group-centric approaches have focused on the mobilization of emotional energy²² or on the spread of violent images through new media.²³

Barry Posen points out in his book, *Inadvertent Escalation*, that there are several theories from elsewhere in the security studies literature that may explain escalation as well. He names

¹⁹ For a longer summary of many of these studies, see Braithwaite and Lemke, “Unpacking Escalation,” 112-113.

²⁰ James Fearon argues that domestic populations tend to react more negatively to signals of escalation, such as mobilization, even when followed by de-escalation, than to a state doing nothing at all. Therefore, mobilizations or other shows/threats of force can be a costly signal that shows a state’s preferences in diplomatic talks. Fearon further argues that democratic states, which have higher audience for escalation, can more credibly signal a peaceful intention, and this may limit escalation especially in disputes with other democratic states. See James Fearon, *Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes*, in *The American Political Science Review*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (September 1994). Maoz and Abdolali, as well as subsequent studies, have shown that joint democracies are less likely to escalate disputes to war, relying heavily on the MID dataset. See Zeev Maoz and Nasrin Abdolali, “Regime Types and International Conflict, 1816-1976,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 33, no. 1 (March 1989): 3–35, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002789033001001>. For more studies, see Braithwaite and Lemke, “Unpacking Escalation,” 112.

²¹ Jervis explores how states develop an image of their adversary as aggressive and does not see how their actions may be hurting the other side and causing them to act aggressively. According to this theory, this can lead to escalation because the party suffering from the bias will see no other way to resolve the conflict. See Robert Jervis, “Perception and Misperception in International Politics,” (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

²² See Isabel Bramsen and Poul Poder, “How Conflict Escalation Happens: Three Central Interaction Rituals in Conflict,” in *Resolving International Conflict: Dynamics of Escalation, Continuation and Transformation*, ed. Isabel Bramsen, Paul Poder, and Ole Weaver (New York: Routledge, 2019), 38-54.

²³ See Josepha Ivanka Wessels, “Syria’s Moving Images: Moral Outrage and the Role of Grassroots Videos in Conflict Escalation,” in *Resolving International Conflict: Dynamics of Escalation, Continuation and Transformation*, ed. Isabel Bramsen, Paul Poder, and Ole Weaver (New York: Routledge, 2019), 87-101.

three specific theories: the security dilemma, organizational interests of militaries, and the fog of war.²⁴ The first two are very influential in the formulation of threats-capabilities theory, while the third one is not. Posen uses these three factors to create a model whereby a conventional war between the US and the Soviet Union could have escalated to a nuclear exchange if conventional forces threatened the security of strategic nuclear forces. The security dilemma is the idea that states pursue policies that make themselves more secure which often make others less secure even when that effect is not intended. The security dilemma is especially strong when the offense is dominant and when offensive and defensive capabilities are less distinguishable.²⁵ In the context of an ongoing war, a security dilemma could arise when one side assumes the worst about opposing moves, leading it to take pre-emptive action and escalate. Organization theory holds that militaries will tend to prefer offensive doctrines in peacetime and will tend to insulate themselves from civilian influence.²⁶ In the context of an existing war, militaries may see a new threat arise and have no other plan to rely on than to go on the offensive. This has precedent - militaries have taken escalatory moves during a war or crisis acting autonomously of civilian control - notably the US dropped depth charges on a Soviet submarine during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Militaries have also engaged in political maneuvering to enact offensive operations, even when civilian officials rejected such operations. A notable example is the 1982 Lebanon War, in which Israeli Defense Minister, and former general, Ariel Sharon masterminded an offensive that lacked support from the Israeli cabinet.²⁷ Sharon was able to get an invasion authorized, and then

²⁴ Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation*, 12-23.

²⁵ For a more detailed look at the security dilemma, see Robert Jervis, "Offense, Defense, and Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma," in *The Use of Force: Military Power and International Politics*, 8th ed, (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015), 46-68.

²⁶ Barry Posen, *The Sources of Military Doctrine*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984).

²⁷ Military action in Lebanon was "rejected from the outset" by a "decisive majority" of the Israeli security Cabinet. It was also opposed by Israel's intelligence community (both Mossad and military intelligence) and many senior

engineer an escalation of the war by manipulating his position as a military expert.²⁸ The fog of war, or the inevitable inability of military and civilian officials to know what is happening on all fronts of a war can also potentially lead to misperceptions that make escalation seem necessary.²⁹ However, in none of the cases in this study was the fog of war present in any meaningful capacity.

There have been many studies done on the ability of large states to get their smaller allies to cooperate. One of the most notable of these works is *Warring Friends* by Jeremy Pressman.³⁰ Pressman discusses the concept of “alliance restraint,” and proposes that when the larger state in an alliance “mobilizes its power resources” it is more likely to succeed in restraining its weaker ally. This study looks closely at one such resource the powerful state has available to it - arms transfers, specifically those during a war. This study also examines directly the decision-making process of the weaker ally, instead of the phenomenon of alliance restraint. This allows the study to build on Pressman’s theory by uncovering the mechanisms large states can use to influence their allies, and the conditions under which Pressman’s theory can operate. Specifically, in the

army officers. Ze’ev Schiff and Ehud Yaari, *Israel’s Lebanon War*, trans. Ina Friedman (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984), 301.

²⁸ The Israeli cabinet had initially approved the invasion of Lebanon within 25 miles of the border. Sharon, however, wanted to drive the IDF all the way to Beirut, which would have necessitated not only a geographic escalation, but a risk of confrontation with Syrian forces stationed in Lebanon. Sharon argued that the cabinet had “no choice” but to authorize his move, as the war had already begun. Ezer Weizman once said Sharon “always knew how to present his positions in a way which would render them acceptable (to the cabinet)...His fingers roamed freely over maps which were utterly incomprehensible for most of his colleagues.” Avner Yaniv, *Dilemmas of Security: Politics, Strategy, and the Israeli Experience in Lebanon* (New York: Oxford university press, 1987), 113.

²⁹ Posen, *Inadvertent Escalation*, 19-23.

³⁰ Jeremy Pressman, *Warring Friends: Alliance Restraint in International Politics*, Cornell Studies in Security Affairs (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008). Other notable works on similar concepts include Brett V Benson, Patrick R Bentley, and James Lee Ray, “Ally Provocateur: Why Allies Do Not Always Behave,” *Journal of Peace Research* 50, no. 1 (January 2013): 47–58, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312454445>; Keren Yarhi-Milo, Alexander Lanoszka, and Zack Cooper, “To Arm or to Ally? The Patron’s Dilemma and the Strategic Logic of Arms Transfers and Alliances,” *International Security* 41, no. 2 (October 2016): 90–139, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00250; Songying Fang, Jesse C. Johnson, and Brett Ashley Leeds, “To Concede or to Resist? The Restraining Effect of Military Alliances,” *International Organization* 68, no. 4 (2014): 775–809, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020818314000137>.

context of escalation, states can supply defensive weapons to their allies to get them to de-escalate, or not supply weapons to them at all. Additionally, when threats to the smaller state are high, this kind of pressure is less likely to work.

Two Israeli scholars have made efforts to analyze this kind of leverage in a less theoretical way and have used the War of Attrition, or closely related events, as a case study. Nitza Nachmias analyzes the Rogers Plan, a US diplomatic initiative named for Secretary of State William Rogers, and argues that US arms supplies to Israel did not give the US enough leverage to force Israel to agree to the plan.³¹ Nachmias takes a very broad view of arms transfers, and doesn't investigate the specific effects that certain capabilities had on Israeli military decision-making, which this study investigates. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov analyzes superpower constraints on Israel's decision-making, taking a similarly broad view of military capabilities.³² Bar-Siman-Tov analyzes the consequences of Israel disregarding constraints, and the success of US efforts to constrain Israel, concluding that Israel was hurt by disregarding them and the US was successful at times at restraining Israel, but unsuccessful at other times.

In summary, there is no widely recognized robust theory of escalation. Several candidate causes have been identified. These potential causes include risk manipulation, the need to escalate to end a war, and misperceptions caused by security dilemmas, organizational interests, the fog of war, or psychological biases. Several factors have also been identified that may inhibit escalation, including deterrence, joint democracy, and alliance restraint.

D. Methods and Case Selection

³¹ Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 19-54.

³² Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers, and the War in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Praeger, 1987), 147-186.

This section explains the case study methodology, which is the method used in this study. . Case studies allow the researcher to examine the decision-making process in depth. This allows the researcher to test unique predictions about the private actions of individuals – assuming enough data is available - something which large-N studies generally do not allow for. This method is well-suited for revealing causal mechanisms and intervening variables.³³ This study is interested in the causes of decisions to escalate, making the case study method ideal. Large-N research on escalation is also possible and could generate unique findings. Such research has been attempted. However, it suffers from a problem of measurement. Most large-N studies of escalation use the Militarized Interstate Dispute (MID) dataset, specifically the hostility level variable.³⁴ This variable is a five-point scale ranging from “no militarized action” to “war.”³⁵ It does not capture escalation within wars and thus is better suited to addressing escalation in disputes or crises. For better large-N studies to be done on escalation in wars, a new way of measuring and coding escalation would be required to determine a universe of cases. In-depth case study research can help with this process.

A case in this study is a decision regarding escalation - this is a decision to escalate, de-escalate, or do nothing. Not all of these decisions within the war are analyzed. The first case analyzed is the Israeli decision to escalate by involving its air force in July 1969. The second is the Egyptian decision to escalate by seeking military intervention from the Soviet Union in December 1969, which fully materialized by April 1970. The third is the Israeli decision to de-escalate by halting its deep penetration airstrikes in Egypt in April 1970. The fourth is the Israeli

³³ Stephen Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Paperback print, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 51-55.

³⁴ Alex Braithwaite and Douglas Lemke, “Unpacking Escalation,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 28, no. 2 (2011): 111–23, 113.

³⁵ Glenn Palmer et al. “Codebook for the Militarized Interstate Dispute Data, Version 5.0.” *Correlates of War*, November 3, 2020, <https://correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/mids/>

decision to not escalate by attacking Egyptian SAM sites in August 1970. In each case, the decision-making process is traced and explained. The phenomena that explain decisions are used as proposed independent variables in threats-capabilities theory, with the escalation outcome as the dependent variable.

This study focuses on the War of Attrition for two main reasons. First, the large variance of the dependent variable, escalation, within the war. Egypt and Israel's escalation strategy changed several times over the course of the war. This makes the war a prime place to look for cases to understand the phenomenon of escalation, as it can be reliably discerned which background conditions change and which stay the same, and how they influence the dependent variable. Second, the War of Attrition is chosen for its resemblance to the current Israel-Hezbollah conflict, which is a major issue of concern for policymakers today. The War of Attrition directly involves Israel, and much of the current policy debate centers on understanding Israel's decisions in the war with Hezbollah. Additionally, both conflicts begin with a long period of relatively low-level fighting, and then a sudden escalation. What remains to be seen is whether both wars will share another thing in common: a real ceasefire.

The four cases within the war are chosen for three main reasons. First, three cases of Israeli decision-making are chosen, and in each there is a different escalation behavior. In the first case, Israel escalates. In the third, they de-escalate. In the fourth, they choose not to escalate. These three cases allow for an assessment of what factors influenced Israeli decision-making at each point in time, and how they changed from case to case. Second, there is more information available on the Israeli decision-making process than the Egyptian one. Third, the sole Egyptian case was chosen to test the theory on a state that was not Israel, controlling for any confounding variables that might result from only looking at Israeli decisions.

E. The War of Attrition

This section provides a general overview of the course of the War of Attrition. Between the Six-Day War of 1967 and the Yom Kippur War of 1973, Israel and Egypt fought another conflict: the War of Attrition. This war arose directly as a product of the conditions created by the Six-Day War. During this war, Israel launched a lightning offensive that destroyed a significant chunk of the Egyptian Air Force³⁶ and captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt.³⁷ The war also led to increased superpower involvement in the region - the Soviet Union agreed to replace Egyptian losses accrued during the war (See Appendix I) and the US moved even closer to Israel. Prior to the war, the US had provided Israel with some weapons, including M-48 Patton Tanks and A-4 Skyhawk fighters.³⁸ After the war, Israel was able to secure a contract to purchase fifty F-4 Phantom fighters. The Phantoms was a top-ticket item for Israel, because of its versatility and its capability to perform long-distance raids.³⁹ The Six-Day War also led Israel to develop a nuclear weapons capability, though this would not play much of a role in the War of Attrition.⁴⁰ Although Israel hoped to use the conflict as an opportunity to resolve the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Arab world responded with the famous three

³⁶ Prior to the Six-Day War, the Egyptian Air Force comprised 420 combat aircraft. 286 were destroyed on June 5th alone, leading Israeli Air Force commander Mordechai Hod to proclaim that “The Egyptian air force has ceased to exist.” Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

³⁷ Israel also captured the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan and the Golan Heights from Syria. For a detailed look at the Six-Day War, see Oren, *Six Days of War*.

³⁸ David Rodman, “Phantom Fracas: The 1968 American Sale of F-4 Aircraft to Israel,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 131.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 131-132.

⁴⁰ According to historian Avner Cohen, Israel had become a nuclear weapon state by May 1967. However, Cohen also notes that “Nothing is known about the nuclear dimension of the War of Attrition.” See Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 275; 287-289.

noes: no peace, no recognition, and no negotiations with Israel.⁴¹ There were attempts to achieve a political solution on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for Israeli withdrawal from “(the) territories occupied during the war.”⁴² However, the Egyptian military came to view these negotiations as failures and by Autumn 1968 saw a military option as the only way to change the positions of Israel and its new American ally.⁴³

Limited fighting along the Suez Canal began in July 1967, in the immediate aftermath of the Six-Day War. It remained very limited, but there were several notable attacks including the Egyptian sinking of the INS Eilat. Israel also shelled the area around Ismailia which created nearly 700,000 refugees.⁴⁴ After October 30th, 1968, there emerged a “de facto ceasefire” which both sides respected until March of 1969.⁴⁵ On March 8 1969, Egyptian President Gamal abd al-Nasser declared that the War of Attrition (*harb al-istinzaf*) had officially begun.⁴⁶ This war consisted almost entirely of increased artillery shelling and commando raids into the Sinai. Over the course of the de-facto ceasefire, Israel had spent time constructing the “Bar-Lev Line,” a series of fortifications named for the Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Chaim Bar-Lev. This represented a shift towards a static defense, where the IDF would hold the waterline instead of relying on mobile units and going on the offense as it did in the Six-Day

⁴¹ Nitza Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms, Leverage and Peace in the Middle East*, Contributions in Military Studies 83 (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood press, 1988), 23.

⁴² “The” is in parentheses because the official English language version of the resolution does not contain it. However, the French version does include a definitive article. For an analysis of the legal implications of the situation, see John McHugo, “Resolution 242: A Legal Appraisal of the Right-Wing Israeli Interpretation of the Withdrawal Phrase with Reference to the Conflict between Israel and the Palestinians.” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 51 (October 2002): 851-882.

⁴³ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition, 1969-1970: A Case-Study of Limited Local War*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 43-45.

⁴⁴ Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 347-348.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 349.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*, 349.

War.⁴⁷ In July 1969, Israel decided to abandon this strategy and escalate the war by involving its air force. According to Ezer Weizman, a former Israeli Air Force commander, the IAF was seen as the “sole solution” to the war.⁴⁸ The IDF ground forces continued to hold the Bar-Lev line. In January of 1970, Israel escalated the war again by carrying out deep penetration strikes into the Egyptian heartland. In the midst of the escalating use of the IAF, the Soviet Union agreed to provide an air defense umbrella to the Egyptians, including Soviet piloted MiG-21J airplanes and advanced SA-3 surface-to-air missiles operated by Soviet crews. The USSR began delivering in December 1969 and the intervention reached a high point by April 1970.⁴⁹ Israel, now fearful of a confrontation with the Soviets, began to de-escalate. The last deep strike was carried out on April 13th, 1970.⁵⁰ However, the war was not over. There were several confrontations between Israeli and Soviet forces, including a well-known encounter where Israeli pilots downed five Soviet-piloted Egyptian-flagged fighters on July 30, 1970.⁵¹ A ceasefire agreement was finally agreed to by Egypt on July 22nd and Israel on August 6th, and the deal went into effect on August 7th.⁵² Under the terms of this deal, there were to be no changes in the military status quo within 50 kilometers of the Suez Canal. Egypt almost immediately violated it and the Israeli leadership seriously considered reigniting the war. However, the peace held.⁵³

⁴⁷ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 61-65.

⁴⁸ Ezer Weizman, *On Eagle's Wings*, (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1976), 271

⁴⁹ Dima P. Adamsky, “Zero-Hour for the Bears’: Inquiring into the Soviet Decision to Intervene in the Egyptian-Israeli War of Attrition, 1969–70,” *Cold War History* 6, no. 1 (February 2006): 113–136, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14682740500395501>, 124.

⁵⁰ Shlaim, Avi, and Raymond Tanter. “Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences: Israel’s Deep-Penetration Bombing in Egypt, 1970.” *World Politics* 30, no. 4 (July 1978): 483–516. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009984>, 496.

⁵¹ Ze’ev Shiff, *A History of the Israeli Army: 1874 to the Present*, (New York: MacMillan Publishing Company, 1985), 158-159.

⁵² Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 47-48.

⁵³ Korn, *Stalemate*, 262-266.

F. Findings

This study proceeds in five parts. The second section analyzes Israel's decision to involve its air force in July 1969. The third analyzes the Soviet intervention - why Egypt sought help in December 1969 and why it was granted. The fourth analyzes Israel's decision to halt its deep penetration strikes in April 1970. The fifth analyzes Israel's decision not to attack Egypt after it violated the ceasefire agreement in August 1970. The sixth and final section offers concluding thoughts and implications for US policymakers.

In the first case, it is found that Israel escalated by involving the air force in July 1969 because of the increase in the perceived threat of Egypt crossing the Suez Canal. However, it limited its escalation because of capabilities restraints – Egypt's air defense system was still active, and Israel's planes had limited capability, and thus they struck only military targets within the canal zone. However, after Israel received F-4 Phantoms from the US and destroyed much of Egypt's air defense network, Israel escalated again by striking targets deep within Egypt in January 1970. This tests the first hypothesis in table 1, along with sub-hypotheses b and c. It also tests the second hypothesis. In the second case, it is found that Egypt sought Soviet intervention in December 1969 because the threat to them from the IAF increased, testing the first hypothesis. This hypothesis is tested against a common explanation of the case: that Nasser sought intervention to keep his own regime intact. In the third case, it is found that Israel de-escalated in April 1970 because of the increase in Egypt's defensive capability because of Soviet intervention, testing the third hypothesis. This is tested against the typical alliance restraint view, that the US used diplomatic pressure to coerce Israel to de-escalate. In the fourth case, it is found that Israel did not attack the SAM sites in August 1970 because maintaining the peace was the

only way to secure specific defensive capabilities from the US. This tests the first hypothesis and sub-hypothesis a.

II. CASE STUDY 1: ESCALATION - ISRAEL INVOLVES THE AIR FORCE (JULY 1969 - JANUARY 1970).

On July 20th, 1969, Israel began to launch a series of air raids against Egyptian positions near the Suez Canal. Before that, Israel had completely refrained from using its Air Force in the War of Attrition for two years. Why did such a sudden change occur? First, the boundaries of the first phase of the war from July 1967 to July 1969 are analyzed, with emphasis on March-July 1969. In this phase fighting was restricted to artillery exchanges and small commando raids. Egypt believed that a limited war was the only way to achieve their desired aim of retaking the Sinai Peninsula because they did not have the capability to take it by force, especially not alone. Likewise, Israel believed that the Egyptians were planning to keep the war limited as they recognized Egypt's constraints. In July 1969, Israel's perceptions of Egypt's war aims changed and this led Israel to escalate by involving the Israeli Air Force (IAF) in the war in July 1969. Of the plans available, the air offensive was the least costly. The belief that Soviet intervention was unlikely made the air offensive more attractive to Israeli decision-makers. In January 1970, Israel's air force began attacking targets deep in Egypt. This was a direct result of the transfer of F-4 Phantom aircraft to Israel from the US in September 1969, and the destruction of Egypt's air defenses by the IAF. This case provides a good test for several of the hypotheses proposed in this study. First, that a state is more likely to escalate when the threat to it increases, as well as the sub-hypotheses that both the likelihood and the level of escalation increase with a rise in

offensive capability. The deep strike portion of this case also provides a good test for the second hypothesis – that an increase in offensive capability can cause escalation.

A. The Boundaries of the First Phase of the War

Most people date the start of the War of Attrition as March 8th, 1969, when Egyptian President Gamal abd al-Nasser declared it and intensified artillery bombardment of Israel's positions in the Sinai Peninsula. However, since the end of the Six Day War in June 1967, there had been periodic raids and artillery fire across the Suez Canal. Nasser's declaration in March 1969 undoubtedly constituted an escalation. However, until the beginning of the Israeli air offensive in July 1969, the War of Attrition remained within strict, salient, lines. On the Egyptian side, operations consisted mostly of shelling against Israel's Bar-Lev line (a fortified position on the west bank of the canal), and on the Israeli side it consisted of counter-artillery fire. Both sides also launched occasional commando raids, but almost all activity remained centralized within the canal zone.⁵⁴ the Israeli Air Force (IAF) was deliberately kept out of the war, almost entirely.⁵⁵

i. Egypt's Limited Aims

Nasser's main aim in the War of Attrition was to bring about a political situation under which the Sinai Peninsula would be returned to Egypt. The Egyptian leadership believed that accomplishing this by force was not possible, as it would've required a general war that Egypt was not equipped for. Nasser believed that a political and military strategy based on a limited

⁵⁴ The one exception to this were two Israeli commando raids on a bridge and dam at NagHammadi, one in October 1968 and the other in April 1969. Morris, Benny. *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2001) 348-350.

⁵⁵ See Korn, *Stalemate*, 166-167 for notable cases where the IAF was used. These cases were very limited and often directed at demonstrating a capability rather than to achieve a specific military purpose.

war could be successful in bringing about that outcome.⁵⁶ Thus the attrition strategy was born. The goal was to wear down Israel while also showcasing to the superpowers that Egypt was capable of upsetting regional stability, shifting international diplomacy in Egypt's favor. Militarily the strategy took advantage of the construction of the Bar-Lev line, which showed Israel's shift away from rapid mobile response that had been challenging to deal with for Egypt in the past.⁵⁷ Nasser also believed that Israel would not escalate, limiting its responses to in-kind artillery fire and commando raids, and keeping the IAF out of play.⁵⁸

Although it was not publicly stated by the Egyptians at the time, there is a widespread consensus among scholars of the War of Attrition that Nasser's strategy did involve the eventual crossing of the canal in a limited fashion.⁵⁹ There was a plan drawn up in May 1969 to send two divisions across the canal and hold part of it, scheduled to be implemented in the fall.⁶⁰ This was by-and-large an extension of the commando raids that the Egyptian army was already carrying out, and the crossing of the canal was intended to facilitate more commando raids. The Egyptian artillery fire was meant to "prepare the ground" for the canal crossing. Thus, in a sense, the Egyptian plan had some level of gradual escalation built in. However, Israeli decision makers did not fully realize the extent of the Egyptian plan at first, as will be discussed later.

The stance of the Soviet Union played a role in Egyptian decision making at this phase in the war, though not a decisive one. After the Six Day War of 1967, the Soviet Union had stepped in to replace Egypt's losses, notably aircraft and air defenses.⁶¹ Nasser knew that Egypt was

⁵⁶ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 47-48.

⁵⁷ Ibid, 50-58.

⁵⁸ Ibid, 57.

⁵⁹ Ahmed S. Khalidi, "The War of Attrition," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 3, no. 1 (October 1973): 62-63, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2535528>; Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition* 53.

⁶⁰ Israel did not have knowledge of this plan's existence. Korn, *Stalemate*, 166.

⁶¹ Korn, *Stalemate*, 56-57.

valuable to Moscow, and believed he could depend on Soviet intervention if Egypt were ever under threat. However, there was not much desire in Moscow for another war in the Middle East, and thus the Soviet foreign minister told Nasser that only diplomacy between the superpowers could bring about a favorable resolution to the conflict for Egypt.⁶² Nasser, however, believed that Soviet intervention could be induced, or the threat of intervention could be made credible enough, and that this would bring about a change in the political situation (particularly US policy) that would favor Egypt.⁶³ Nasser decided to launch the War of Attrition without seeking the opinion of the Soviet Union.⁶⁴

ii. Israel's Limited Response

Nasser correctly anticipated the initial Israeli response almost exactly. Israel refrained from using its air force and maintained a defensive posture with mostly in-kind retaliation including artillery fire of its own and small raids into Egyptian territory.⁶⁵ The most important factor in Israel's decision to keep the war limited was the perception that Egypt too wanted only a limited war. Assuming that to be the case, unnecessary offensive action on Israel's part would've been likely to provoke a wider war that Israel was keen to avoid. Additionally, the limited use of the air force would endanger Israel's warplanes which would be necessary if such a war did eventually break out.⁶⁶ These reasons combined to keep Israel's response limited.

⁶² Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 47.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 52.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 46.

⁶⁵ Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 64.

⁶⁶ Shlaim, Avi, and Raymond Tanter. "Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences: Israel's Deep-Penetration Bombing in Egypt, 1970." *World Politics* 30, no. 4 (July 1978): 483–516. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009984>, 485.

The principal fear of most Israeli decision-makers was a “general war,” one which may have involved not just Egypt but the Palestinians and the other Arab states as well.⁶⁷ They correctly understood that Egypt was not capable of launching such a war. In February 1968 Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan stated publicly that a “green light” from the Soviet Union may have changed this fact,⁶⁸ but the Israeli intelligence community had no indication that the Soviets had sent such a signal to the Egyptians. After the declaration of the War of Attrition, Israel’s views remained the same.⁶⁹ This perception had not changed even after months of the first phase of the war, in which Egyptian raids in the Sinai Peninsula raised concerns.⁷⁰ The central figure in the Israeli cabinet advocating for the restrained approach was Dayan, who remained strong in his convictions in favor of a “defensive stand”⁷¹ and only changed his mind in mid-July 1969.⁷² Proposals to escalate the war were discussed in the Israeli cabinet as early as May 1969. The chief advocate of escalation was former IAF commander Ezer Weizman, who was then deputy chief of the Israel General Staff.⁷³ Weizman has gained a reputation among scholars for over-emphasizing the usefulness of air power.⁷⁴ When he initially brought up the idea of bombing, the idea was rejected for both tactical and strategic reasons. Tactically, the IAF, led by General Mordechai Hod, believed that it would struggle to deal with Egypt’s Surface-to-Air Missile

⁶⁷ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 61.

⁶⁸ Ibid, 61-62.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 66.

⁷⁰ Ibid, 70-71.

⁷¹ Ibid, 70. Notably, Dayan always left open the possibility that Israel would have to shift to the offensive if Egypt forced its hand, or if Egypt’s war aims escalated. A canal crossing was perhaps the only thing that could’ve satisfied Dayan’s requirements. Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 64.

⁷² Moshe Dayan, *Moshe Dayan: Story of my Life*, (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1976), 448.

⁷³ Shlaim and Tanter. “Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences,” p. 484

⁷⁴ Famously, during the Six Day War, Weizman supported a plan that involved heavy use of the air force, despite acknowledging that there was not widespread agreement that the IAF was even capable of dealing with Arab air defenses. John Mearsheimer, *Conventional Deterrence*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), 148.

(SAM) system.⁷⁵ There was also concern that the IAF would simply be ineffective at targeting Egyptian artillery.⁷⁶ Strategically, Dayan believed that an escalation that hurt Egypt too much would've provoked a Soviet intervention,⁷⁷ or an escalation into general war with Egypt and potentially the other Arab states that Israel did not want.⁷⁸ Crucially, this is all within the context of the Israeli leadership believing that an Egyptian canal crossing was not in the cards.

Where Weizman's influence was felt more was in Israeli military planning. It was at Weizman's direction that Hod prepared the plan that would eventually be put into action.⁷⁹ This direction was given in early July of 1969, before Dayan and the rest of the Israeli cabinet decided to approve the involvement of the IAF. The only other military plan for an escalation that existed when the cabinet was discussing such a move involved a full-scale crossing of the canal with Israeli ground forces.⁸⁰

B. Israel's Changing Perceptions of Egypt's War Aims and The Decision to use the IAF

In mid-July 1969, the decision makers in Israel came to believe that Egypt was gearing up for a crossing of the Suez Canal, and the only way to prevent such a move was through military means. The means chosen was the use of the IAF to attack Egyptian artillery and SAM sites near the canal. Chief of Staff of the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) Haim Bar-Lev referred to this strategy as "escalation for the sake of de-escalation"⁸¹ as the goal was to convince Egypt that

⁷⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 85. This objection came from the air force, but it was closely related to the strategic-level argument championed by Dayan that Israel needed to maintain its stocks of warplanes should a general war occur.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Korn, *Stalemate*, 165-166.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 166.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 165.

⁸⁰ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 86.

⁸¹ Ibid, 87.

a canal crossing would not be feasible. This provides support for the hypothesis that an increase in threat makes escalation more likely. It also provides support for the sub-hypothesis that this escalation will be constrained by limited offensive capabilities.

The decision to involve the IAF was made on July 13th, 1969, after Dayan became an advocate.⁸² The operation went into full force on July 20th, 1969.⁸³ A key moment that led to this sudden shift on Dayan's behalf was an Egyptian raid on an Israeli tank depot at Port Tawfiq on July 10th, 1969 that claimed forty casualties and five tanks.⁸⁴ One Israeli journalist wrote "when future military historians come to sum up what happened...they will doubtless be surprised at the extent to which this raid...was decisive in bringing about one of the gravest escalations of the war."⁸⁵ It is not entirely clear how this specific raid changed Dayan's mind. However, it is clear that his mind was changed within days of the raid, as he was the one that went to the Cabinet for approval.⁸⁶

As discussed earlier, the air offensive was one of only two options available to Israel to deal with the new threat of a potential canal crossing. There were two reasons that Israel chose the air offensive over the ground offensive. First, the Israeli leadership, influenced by Dayan, believed any canal crossing on Egypt's behalf would require the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) to have air superiority in the canal zone. The air offensive would demonstrate to Egypt that this was not going to be the case.⁸⁷ Second, the air offensive was considerably less costly than the ground

⁸² Dayan, *Story of My Life*, 448.

⁸³ Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 64.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 223n1.

⁸⁶ Dayan, *Story of My Life*, 448.

⁸⁷ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 86.

offensive as the IAF was staffed entirely by regular forces, unlike the army. Additionally, expected losses were lower for the air offensive than the ground offensive.⁸⁸

The air operation proceeded in three phases. The first two of which lasted only about a week each. From July 20th-28th 1969, the Israeli strikes were aimed at, and successful in achieving, an Egyptian abandonment of any plans to cross the canal.⁸⁹ The second phase, from August 13th to August 19th 1969, was known as a “linked response” in which the IAF would respond directly to Egyptian artillery fire with airstrikes.⁹⁰ The third phase began in September 1969 and lasted until January 1970, and featured continuous bombing of Egyptian military targets in the canal zone, with an emphasis on destroying Egypt’s SAM system in the canal zone.⁹¹ By October 1969, the Egyptian air defense system in the area had been almost completely wiped out.⁹²

C. The Deep Strikes

At the same time as the third phase of the air war was beginning in September 1969, Ezer Weizman was concocting a plan for even greater involvement of the IAF. Specifically, he wanted to strategically bomb important sites in the Egyptian hinterland and near Cairo to bring a decisive end to the War of Attrition.⁹³ His ideas were rejected initially - largely because the Egyptian air defense system was still intact. Weizman argued for a ground operation to forcibly

⁸⁸ Korn, *Stalemate*, 167.

⁸⁹ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 56.

⁹⁰ Ibid, 89.

⁹¹ Ibid, 90.

⁹² Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 65.

⁹³ Shlaim and Tanter argue that the General Staff “was not divided into supporters and opponents, but into supporters and doubters.” Put another way, no one opposed Weizman’s plan on principle, they just thought the time was not right. This is not necessarily implying that everyone thought the right time would come, there is no reason to believe that is the case. Shlaim and Tanter. “Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences,” 486.

destroy the SAM sites near the canal,⁹⁴ but this plan was rejected out of hand. Losses in such an operation were expected to be incredibly high, and there was no bridge the IDF could use to cross the canal. Additionally, the Israelis viewed a crossing of the canal as potentially escalatory in a way that could invoke Soviet intervention or draw the wrath of the US.⁹⁵

Key to Weizman's idea was the arrival of F4 Phantom Jets in Israel in September 1969, which greatly increased the IAF's ability to bomb deep into Egypt. The purchase of these jets from the US had been arranged almost a year prior, but the delivery took time.⁹⁶ The Phantom had a range, payload, and speed that was unmatched by any other plane in the IAF's arsenal, making it ideal for long range bombing missions.⁹⁷ The Phantom also boasted electronic countermeasures, which assuaged some of Dayan's fears about attrition of aircraft discussed earlier.⁹⁸

In late December 1969 and early January of 1970, there was renewed discussion of pursuing deep strikes into Egypt among the IDF General Staff.⁹⁹ The capabilities of the phantoms were a key argument in favor of Weizman's position, as was the partial restoration of the Egyptian SAM network.¹⁰⁰ Also key in the decision was the belief that deep penetration bombing would not anger Moscow, and would in fact be supported by Washington. On the former count, the Israelis were dead wrong and that will be discussed in the second case study.¹⁰¹ On the latter count,

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 118.

⁹⁶ Rodman, David. "Phantom Fracas: The 1968 American Sale of F-4 Aircraft to Israel." *Middle Eastern Studies* 40, no. 6 (2004): 130–44, p. 130.

⁹⁷ Shlaim and Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences," 489.

⁹⁸ Ibid, 490.

⁹⁹ Knesset elections were going on at the time, and there was not much discussion of the plans in government circles. The discussions were almost entirely within the military. Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 119.

¹⁰⁰ These two are related. The Phantoms were much more capable of destroying the SAMs than other Israeli aircraft, and destroying what had been rebuilt of the network was a key element of their mission. Shlaim and Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice, and Consequences," 496; Korn, *Stalemate*, 175.

¹⁰¹ Prime Minister Golda Meir remarked in an interview months after the start of the deep strikes on the potential of Soviet Intervention that "nobody thought of that then." Meir was exaggerating, there was some discussion of the possibility. However, almost everyone in the cabinet came to believe in the theory of former deputy Prime Minister

however, Washington was indeed supportive. The deep strikes provide support for the hypothesis that a change in capability alone will make escalation more likely. The threat Egypt posed to Israel was no higher in January 1970 than in September 1969, but after the arrival of a new offensive capability (the Phantoms), escalation prevailed.

III. CASE STUDY 2: ESCALATION – EGYPT SEEKS SOVIET INTERVENTION

(DECEMBER 1969-APRIL 1970)

In December 1969, the Egyptians escalated the war by asking the Soviet Union to provide them with an air defense umbrella because they had no other way of defending against the Israeli Air Force (IAF). This assistance was granted, and Soviet forces built up in Egypt from December 1969-April 1970. The Soviet Union had provided Egypt with some arms before December of 1969, but this was limited to 1) replacements of equipment lost in the Six-Day War (see Appendix I for details) and 2) small shipments of weapons that had little to no strategic impact on the war,¹⁰² thus the request made was undoubtedly an escalation. The decision to seek this intervention, as well as the Soviet decision to grant the assistance, was made before the onset of the deep penetration strikes on January 7th, 1970, but in direct response to the involvement of the IAF which began in July 1969 and intensified in September 1969. The Soviet intervention took the form of Soviet pilots, planes, advanced SA-3 Surface-to-Air Missiles¹⁰³ and the Soviet

Yigal Allon that the Soviets would not intervene in the Middle East for fear of a confrontation with the US. No one seriously challenged that belief. See Korn, *Stalemate*, 166; 177-178.

¹⁰² For example, the Soviets provided Egypt with the *Strela-2* MANPAD system as early as August of 1969. The *Strela* did shoot down an Israeli *Skyhawk* but on a grand scale it was not effective at dealing with the IAF. see Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 119-123.

¹⁰³ There are several names for this missile system. The NATO reporting name is SA-3, and that designation is used throughout this study. The Russian name is the S-125 *Neva*. Many sources also refer to it as the SAM-3, despite no official source using this designation. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The Soviet SA-3 Missile System*, July 8, 1965. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP78T05439A000500210055-7.pdf>.

crews necessary to operate them, and ZSU-23-4 anti-aircraft guns.¹⁰⁴ The first subsection traces the Egyptian decision to intervene, exploring the hypothesis that the new threat of the IAF caused Egypt to ask for help as well as the common argument that Nasser sought help because the IAF's strategic bombing campaign was a danger to the survival of Nasser's regime. The second subsection touches on the Soviet side of the decision, asking what Moscow thought about intervention. This case provides support for the hypothesis that an increase in threat increases the chances of escalation. It also provides an example of a larger state (the USSR) choosing a policy of providing defensive weapons, and not offensive ones, to its smaller ally. As the third case study will show, this policy was rather effective.

A. The Egyptian Decision

Classic accounts of the Egyptian decision to seek Soviet intervention rely on the account of Mohamed Heikal, a close friend to Nasser and a propagandist for his regime who often wrote in the newspaper *Al-Ahram*.¹⁰⁵ It is a common argument that Nasser invoked Soviet intervention out of fear for his own grip on power, which the deep penetration strikes were aimed at weakening or overthrowing.¹⁰⁶ Weakening Nasser's regime was indeed an aim of the deep strikes.¹⁰⁷ However, Given Heikal's role and the emergence of archival documents that contradict some aspects of his version of events, many have begun to doubt whether Heikal's

¹⁰⁴ Shlaim and Tanter, "Decision Process," 499.

¹⁰⁵ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 146.

¹⁰⁶ For examples of this argument, see Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, 108; Shlaim and Tanter, "Decision Process, Choice, and Consequence," 502 (representing the view of Israeli officials at the time); Galia Golan, *Soviet Policies in the Middle East from World War II to Gorbachev* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 73; Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The Myth of Strategic Bombing: Israeli Deep-Penetration Air Raids in the War of Attrition, 1969-70," *Journal of Contemporary History* 19, no. 3 (1984): 557.

¹⁰⁷ Although Israel never explicitly stated this was their goal, and in fact sometimes stated the opposite, most scholars agree that this was indeed a goal of the deep strikes. For more discussion of the issue, see Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 120-125.

timeline can be trusted at all. One of the most widely debated elements of Heikal's story is the date that Egypt asked for intervention. According to Heikal, Nasser visited Moscow on January 22nd, 1970 (after the Israeli deep strikes had begun), complained to Soviet premier Brezhnev that "I am a leader who is bombed every day in his own country, whose army is exposed, and whose people are naked,"¹⁰⁸ and threatened to resign and allow a pro-American president to take power if the Soviets did not give him what he wanted. This chronology is most likely not correct. First, no Soviet or Russian source mentions a visit by Nasser to Moscow in January 1970,¹⁰⁹ and Nasser himself only mentioned it once in a July 1970 speech.¹¹⁰ A new timeline that has developed in recent years places the decision before the onset of Israel's deep penetration strikes, but after the destruction of Egypt's air defenses at the hands of the IAF.

On December 8th, 1969, a delegation was sent from Egypt to Moscow consisting of Vice President Anwar Sadat, Foreign Minister Mahmoud Riad, and Minister of War Mohammed Fawzi.¹¹¹ While in Moscow, according to Riad's memoir, this delegation secured an agreement from Soviet Premier Brezhnev to supply to Egypt airplanes, pilots, SA-3 surface-to-air missiles, and the crews necessary to operate them.¹¹² Soviet plans for a potential intervention go back even further - a group of Soviet volunteers had already been training in the Soviet Union since September 1969, and the air defense units had been training since October 1969. By December 1969, the total number of soldiers in the Soviet operation was over 10,000.¹¹³ Soviet MiGs had even begun deploying to Egypt by late December 1969, before Heikal suggests the ask ever took

¹⁰⁸ Mohamed Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, (London: William Collins Sons & Co., 1975), 87.

¹⁰⁹ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 132.

¹¹⁰ Cited in Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile*, 107.

¹¹¹ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 132-133.

¹¹² Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), 113.

¹¹³ Adamsky, "Zero Hour for the Bears," 124.

place.¹¹⁴ The SA-3s were always going to take longer to deploy - the initial plan was for late March or early April of 1970, and the first SA-3s did in fact become operational on the night of March 24-25th, 1970.¹¹⁵ This evidence shows that the Israeli deep strikes could not have been the cause of the Egyptian decision to seek soviet intervention.¹¹⁶ Even if Heikal is correct that Nasser visited Moscow in January, it was at most aimed at arranging details or meant to accelerate the deal that had already been made.¹¹⁷

Why, then, did Nasser decide to seek help from the Soviets? What threat was he concerned about? A good starting point is the Egyptian military situation at the time. The Egyptian Air Defense Force (EADF)¹¹⁸ was reliant on the SA-2 Surface-to-Air Missile (SAM) system for its air defense through the end of 1969, which was simply not effective against the IAF.¹¹⁹ They were unable to hit anything flying below 500 meters and struggled in the range of 500-1000 meters.¹²⁰ Israeli jets easily flew under this threshold, especially the Phantoms. Egypt was forced to abandon its plans to cross the Suez Canal, and was also forced to reduce its artillery attacks against Israel - From March to July 1969, artillery accounted for 48.8% of Egyptian attacks, and only 19.3% in the period of August to December of the same year.¹²¹ The

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid; Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 158.

¹¹⁶ A weaker form of this argument has also been advanced, that the Soviet decision to intervene was made *in principle* before the deep strikes, but *put into operation* on an accelerated schedule of them. However, this argument is highly reliant on Heikal's January 22nd date of Nasser's visit, and thus can also be regarded as disproven. See Bar-Siman Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 145-149. Additionally, as discussed, there is no evidence that the Soviet deployments were in fact accelerated. The air defense specifically was delivered as planned, and the deployment of Soviet planes began before the deep strikes did.

¹¹⁷ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 126. Additionally, Anwar Sadat's autobiography makes reference to a January 22nd visit. However, Sadat quotes Nasser as saying "They will apparently keep their word *this time*" (emphasis added) after returning to Egypt, implying previous negotiations had taken place. Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1979), 197.

¹¹⁸ The EADF was a separate branch of the military from the Army and Air Force.

¹¹⁹ Alvin Rubinstein, *Red Star on the Nile: The Soviet-Egyptian Influence Relationship Since the June War*, (Princeton University Press, 1977), 108.

¹²⁰ Heikal, *The Road to Ramadan*, 84.

¹²¹ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 90-99.

weak SA-2s were almost entirely destroyed.¹²² This was the military state of affairs that led Nasser to send a team to Moscow in December 1969.

Tapping into the Soviet stockpile was simply the only way Nasser could rectify this problem. The most significant pieces of technology were the SA-3 system and the MiG-21J fighter. The SA-3 was much more effective against the Phantom, as well as the electronic countermeasures Israel was using to jam the SA-2s.¹²³ The MiG-21Js were capable of directly competing with the Phantoms in the air, and actually shot down several once the intervention began.¹²⁴ Both the SA-3 and the MiG-21J required Soviet personnel to operate them.¹²⁵ Beyond the military level, the presence of Soviet personnel would also provide a political benefit for Egypt over Israel - the risk of a Soviet-Israeli conflict would be increased should Israel continue the war.¹²⁶

It can thus be concluded that the most important factors in shaping Egypt's decision to escalate the war by involving the Soviet Union were 1) the threat they faced from the IAF - notably not a threat to Nasser or his regime, but to the overall military capabilities of the state and 2) the ability of Soviet technology to answer the threat clearly. This is enough to explain why *Egypt* escalated the war. However, it is still worth examining the *Soviet* decision to intervene. If the Soviets had declined to provide Egypt with assistance, this chapter would likely not have been written. It is also worth examining why the Soviet intervention took the exact form

¹²² Korn, *Stalemate*, 175.

¹²³ Oz Frankel, "Coca-Cola, Black Panthers, and Phantom Jets: Israel in the American Orbit, 1967-1973" (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024), 135.

¹²⁴ "Egyptians Shoot Down an Israeli Plane," *The New York Times* (New York), August 4, 1970.

¹²⁵ David A. Korn, *Stalemate: The War of Attrition and Great Power Diplomacy in the Middle East, 1967-1970*. (Milton: Routledge, 1992), 191,

¹²⁶ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 138.

it did. Air defense was not the only thing the Egyptians asked for - they also asked for TU-16 long range bombers. However, these were not supplied in numbers.¹²⁷

B. The Soviet Decision

Despite claims to the contrary,¹²⁸ the Soviet decision to intervene was not a difficult one to make. Soviet preparations for “Operation Kavkaz”¹²⁹ were already underway by August 1969, as discussed earlier. Some scholars even argue that the USSR made the decision to deploy air defenses to Egypt in March of 1968, and were simply waiting for a good excuse.¹³⁰ The Soviets did not make these preparations out of concern for Egypt - the air defenses in Egypt were bound up in Soviet policy in the Mediterranean. After the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962, the USSR made efforts to achieve strategic parity with the US. One key element of that strategy was deploying naval forces into Egypt to monitor the US Sixth Fleet and provide advanced warning of a potential nuclear strike.¹³¹ Air defense in Egypt would improve Soviet capability to shoot down US planes in the event of a war.¹³² The need to shoot down Israeli planes also entered the

¹²⁷ George L. Simpson, “Cold War, Hot Summer: Superpower Involvement in the War of Attrition in 1970,” *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 6, no. 2 (April 3, 2015): 103-123, <https://doi.org/10.1080/21520844.2015.1051884>, 110. Egypt did receive some TU-16s over the course of the war, but not in large enough numbers to use them offensively. See Appendix III. It should also be noted there is a difference between the standard variant of the TU-16, which was a bomber, and the TU-16R which was a reconnaissance plane. The TU-16R was used by the Soviets in Egypt during the war. Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 60-61.

¹²⁸For examples of this claim, see Golan, *Soviet Policies*, 73

¹²⁹ Kavkaz is the Russian word for “Caucases.” The name of the operation was used as early as September 1968 to refer to smaller deployments of Soviet forces in Egypt, and as late as October 1973 for the military advisers that remained there after President Sadat expelled the Soviet regulars. Adamsky, “Zero Hour for the Bears,” 119; 129.

¹³⁰ Mohrez Mahmoud el-Hussini, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations, 1945-85* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 181-183. Some go as far as to say, “had the War of Attrition never happened the Soviets, ruled by their global motives, probably would have introduced their air defence [sic] military units into Egypt anyway.” Adamsky, “Zero Hour for the Bears,” 128.

¹³¹ Adamsky, “Zero Hour for the Bears,” 118.

¹³² It is also possible that the Soviets believed air defenses could’ve shot down American ICBMs or SSBNs, though the technical credibility of this argument is doubtful. Hussini, *Soviet-Egyptian Relations*, 180-181.

conversation when the IAF attacked Port Said on July 22nd, 1969, where Soviet naval forces were stationed.¹³³

The Soviets were mindful of the risks of arming Egypt and placed several limits on their military support. After the Six-Day War, Egypt had requested a formal security agreement with the USSR that would've led to the USSR taking responsibility for Egypt's air defense.¹³⁴

Although they did agree to provide Egypt with replacements of equipment lost in the Six-Day War, it demanded concessions in the form of using Port Said and Alexandria as naval bases.¹³⁵

The head of Soviet Advisers in Egypt, General Laschenko, believed that aggressive Soviet military moves could provoke an American response.¹³⁶ Additionally, as discussed earlier, the Soviets declined to provide Egypt with long-range bombers at any point during the War of Attrition, though exact Soviet motives for this are unclear.

IV. CASE STUDY 3: DE-ESCALATION – ISRAEL HALTS THE DEEP STRIKES (MARCH 1970 - APRIL 1970)

On March 18th, 1970, Israel discovered that the USSR had begun to deploy SA-3 SAMs in Egypt.¹³⁷ Israel responded by de-escalating the war by halting their deep strikes, limiting air operations to the zone within about 50 kilometers of the Suez Canal. On March 22nd, Israeli

¹³³ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 118.

¹³⁴ Golan, *Soviet Policies*, 69.

¹³⁵ Hussini, *Soviet Egyptian Relations*, 177.

¹³⁶ Adamsky, "Zero Hour for the Bears," 118.

¹³⁷ Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 171. This was reported publicly in the New York Times the next day. See "Soviet Troops and Missiles Reported to be in Egypt" *New York Times*, Mar 19, 1970.

Defense Minister Moshe Dayan announced, after significant debate in the Israeli security cabinet, that raids would be limited, and on April 13th the last deep strike was carried out.¹³⁸ Israel did not halt all air operations - maintaining air superiority in the canal zone was still a priority of the IAF.¹³⁹ This section will show that the capabilities of the SA-3 to shoot down Israeli planes and the threat of a direct confrontation with the Soviet Union caused this sudden de-escalation. International pressure was not a cause of this de-escalation - the US did not place significant pressure on Israel in this period.¹⁴⁰ Thus, the effect of the Soviet intervention was to effectively restore the status quo that existed in Spring of 1969 - Egypt had a well-defended front line and Israel felt like it could not safely bomb deep within Egypt. This case supports the hypothesis that an increase in one state's defensive capability makes de-escalation on the other side of the conflict more likely. Even though the threat to Israel did not decrease and if anything increased, Israeli decisionmakers chose to de-escalate their war effort.

A. Initial Response to the Detection of the SA-3s - The Dayan/Allon Debate

On March 18th, 1970, Israel discovered that Soviet crews were manning SA-3 missile emplacements, igniting a debate within the security cabinet about how to best respond. The missiles at were stationed around the Egyptian cities of Cairo and Alexandria, as well as around the Aswan Dam, and did not threaten Israeli air superiority in the canal zone.¹⁴¹ Vice Premier

¹³⁸ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 152-154.

¹³⁹ Korn, *Stalemate*, 225. It should also be noted that the "canal zone" stretched about 30 kilometers past the Suez Canal into Egyptian territory. The US, at Israel's request, warned the Soviet Union not to place SAMs within this line, and the Soviets mostly obliged - their most forward-deployed SAM site before the ceasefire in August 1970 was 23 km from the Canal. Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 161-162.

¹⁴⁰ The US at the time was of the position that Israel should agree to a ceasefire that would end the war, but that US position existed prior to the deployment of the SA-3s and did not shift significantly once they were deployed. Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 170.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 168.

Yigal Allon became a voice for continuation of the deep strikes. Allon argued that the Soviet intervention was limited and the IAF was still capable of deep strikes even through the added capabilities of the SA-3. He even advocated attacking the SA-3 sites.¹⁴² However, Defense Minister Moshe Dayan was able to convince the cabinet of the opposite position. Dayan had been mindful of the risk of both Soviet intervention and attrition to Egyptian air defenses since the beginning of the war, and advocated restraint when discussing the use of the IAF in the summer of 1969.¹⁴³ By March 22nd, 1970, Dayan had won the debate. That day he made the announcement that Israel was limiting its deep strikes both geographically and in terms of targets, effectively ending the strategic bombing component of the deep strikes.¹⁴⁴ On April 9th, Dayan said that “we make no pretension to behave in the skies over Cairo as if they were our own,” and completely halted deep strikes on April 13th.¹⁴⁵

What caused Dayan to advocate and implement this rapid shift in policy? Threats-capabilities theory predicts that Dayan would be heavily motivated by the losses he would expect to suffer in continuing the current level of fighting. Two major factors could have caused a major increase in those casualties- the prospect of increased Soviet intervention and the direct effects of the SA-3 missiles. Without the capability to mitigate those factors, Israel should be likely to de-escalate. The next few paragraphs show that both factors were motivating factors for Dayan.

The belief that Soviet intervention in the War of Attrition was unlikely was key in the Israeli decision to launch the deep strikes in the first place. This belief, which was held by most senior Israeli officials until it became obvious that Soviet troops were deployed in Egypt,¹⁴⁶ was

¹⁴² Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 153.

¹⁴³ Korn, *Stalemate*, 165-166. See Case 1 for more details.

¹⁴⁴ Simpson, “Cold War, Hot Summer,” 112.

¹⁴⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 153-154.

¹⁴⁶ AMAN, Israel’s military intelligence unit, missed several signs that Soviet policy was changing. These included signals intelligence showing a greater link between Egypt and the USSR, the detection of T-shaped dugouts in Egypt

key to the continuation of the campaign. From a military perspective, much of Israel's security cabinet was driven by the theories of Allon. Allon argued that the Soviets had never deployed a significant expeditionary force outside of Europe before and was unlikely to start with Egypt. He also argued that the USSR would not want to run the risk of a confrontation with the US, and thus would stay out of the Middle East.¹⁴⁷ Israel's intelligence apparatus developed a conception after the Six-Day War in 1967 that also viewed Soviet intervention as unlikely, echoing Allon's logic almost exactly.¹⁴⁸ AMAN, Israel's military intelligence unit and its only intelligence estimator prepared an intelligence estimate in October 1969, after the use of the IAF had begun, which stated that intervention was still unlikely because of the possibility of a superpower confrontation.¹⁴⁹ This intelligence estimate was used as the sole basis for assessing risk of intervention when the security cabinet was discussing the deep strikes in late December 1969-early January 1970.¹⁵⁰ This shows that the proven "Sovietization"¹⁵¹ of the conflict undercut an important building block of the deep strike strategy. Increased fear of Soviet involvement was a cause of de-escalation in this case. Further showing this is the fact that Dayan's strategy was explicitly aimed at reducing the risk of it. On April 9, 1970, Dayan justified his policy of limiting the deep strikes saying that "I hope that this policy will insure our avoiding...war with the Soviet

where the SA-3s would ultimately be placed, and a January 1970 cable from Soviet PM Alexei Kosygin to President Nixon that Israel was aware of, in which Kosygin said the USSR would be forced to "see to it that the Arab states have means at their disposal, with the help of which a due rebuff to the arrogant aggressor could be made." For an extensive list of such signs, see Dima Adamsky and Uri Bar-Joseph, "'The Russians Are Not Coming': Israel's Intelligence Failure and Soviet Military Intervention in the 'War of Attrition,'" *Intelligence and National Security* 21, no. 1 (February 2006): 1-25, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02684520600568238>. For the specific claim that Israel was surprised, see *Ibid*, 9.

¹⁴⁷ Korn, *Stalemate*, 166.

¹⁴⁸ Intelligence officials placed less weight on the precedent aspect of Allon's argument, but both were in strong agreement that the USSR was interested in avoiding a confrontation with the US, and that a proxy war was liable to bring that situation about. Adamsky and Bar-Joseph, "'The Russians Are Not Coming,'" 4.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁵¹ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 152.

Union.”¹⁵² His goal was to create a “modus vivendi” whereby the Soviets would defend Egyptian cities, but Israeli air superiority would be maintained in the canal zone.

Apart from the fact that Soviet crews were manning them, the SA-3s themselves posed a direct military threat that the IDF had no answer to. . On March 19th, Israeli Ambassador to the US Yitzhak Rabin met with US President Richard Nixon and National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger. Nixon abruptly asked Rabin if Israel was considering attacking the missiles. Rabin, in his memoir, wrote that “it was doubtful that Israel was *able* or willing to.”¹⁵³ To demonstrate this point, it is necessary to look slightly into the future. On June 30, 1970, the Soviets and Egyptians began installing the “SAM-Box,” a rectangle stretching from Ismailia to the Suez-Cairo highway, ranging from 23 to 55 kilometers from the Suez Canal.¹⁵⁴ Once the SA-3s were deployed inside this zone, Israel began to take heavy losses. Five Israeli F-4 Phantoms were downed within a three-week period.¹⁵⁵ Israel only had 50 Phantoms at the time - meaning Israel’s phantom stockpile was literally decimated in less than a month.¹⁵⁶ This proved to be incredibly difficult for Israel to bear and would’ve been just as difficult had Israel not de-escalated in March 1970.

Allons’s side of the debate may have been strengthened if Israel had access to certain capabilities that made IAF planes more effective against the SA-3, or if they could convince the US to match a potential Soviet escalation. The US was never on board for a confrontation with the USSR, but they did send Israel electronic countermeasure (ECM) equipment later on in the

¹⁵² Quoted in *Ibid*, 154.

¹⁵³ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 172. Emphasis added.

¹⁵⁴ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 162.

¹⁵⁵ Korn, *Stalemate*, 231.

¹⁵⁶ See Appendix IV.

war after two Phantoms were shot down in June 1970.¹⁵⁷ ECM technology allowed IAF planes to disable SAMs when flying in straight lines at a high altitude and in tight formation.¹⁵⁸ When this capability was provided, despite the fact that no testing was done and it was thus rather ineffective,¹⁵⁹ Israel felt more comfortable attacking the SAM-Box. However, this ECM technology was totally absent from IDF stocks in March and April 1970.

It should also be noted that the SAM-Box was a greater *threat* to Israel because of its proximity. The closest missiles in the box were 23 kilometers from the Suez Canal, and the SA-3 had a range of 27 kilometers.¹⁶⁰ Had the SAMs moved any closer, Israel would've lost air superiority *on its own side* on the Canal. This can be demonstrated by looking both forward and backward. Earlier in the war, Israeli officials had placed great emphasis on destroying Egypt's old SAM network, before the arrival of the SA-3s.¹⁶¹ Looking forward, during the first day of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, SAMs stationed in the Canal Zone (within 30km of the Canal, that is) shot down more than 30 Israeli planes.¹⁶² Although this may have been an exaggeration, Foreign Minister Abba Eban told the Knesset in July 1970 "The battle on the canal line is the battle to preserve the very existence of the State of Israel."¹⁶³

B. Israeli-American Communications

¹⁵⁷ Korn, *Stalemate*, 230-231.

¹⁵⁸ Frankel, *Coca-Cola*, 135,

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 75.

¹⁶¹ See Case Study 1.

¹⁶² Jon D. Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs: The Soviet Union and war in the Middle East* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins university press, 1975), 127. It should be noted that most of these planes were shot down by SA-6 mobile launchers, which were deployed after the War of Attrition. The SA-3s did shoot down some, and the SA-6s were fired from within the Canal Zone.

¹⁶³ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 360.

Could diplomatic pressure from the US explain Israel's de-escalation? US Secretary of State William Rogers had proposed several plans to end the War of Attrition, and he hoped to achieve a settlement to the entire Arab-Israeli conflict along the way.¹⁶⁴ Though most American officials agreed that Israel should remain in a strong position, there were some who believed that putting pressure on Israel may be necessary to achieve this goal.¹⁶⁵ However, as this segment will show, US diplomatic moves were not the driving force in Israel's decision to de-escalate. However, the US did delay the sale of additional planes to Israel which certainly didn't ease the military pressure on Israel to de-escalate.

Diplomatic pressure was not successful prior to Soviet intervention. When the Israeli cabinet made the decision on January 7th, 1970, to launch the deep strikes, many of the ministers relied on the testimony of Ambassador Rabin that the US would tacitly support them.¹⁶⁶ Rabin reported to Jerusalem that he "had a green light to go over Cairo, to attack and attack."¹⁶⁷ Most ministers in the Israeli cabinet supported the deep strikes even if it the US did not approve them.¹⁶⁸ For most of January 1970, there was no US pressure. Tensions only started to emerge on January 30th, when President Nixon told Israel it was delaying any decisions on Israel's request

¹⁶⁴ Rogers announced the most developed version of his peace plan at a speech on December 9th, 1969. This plan called for no contractual peace but "universal respect for sovereignty," vague concepts of demilitarized zones, and Israeli withdrawal from territory in line with Resolution 242. Egypt rejected the deal, the Soviets were initially in favor of it but quickly adopted the Egyptian position, and Israel strongly rejected it. Prime Minister Meir used the words 'bitterly disappointed,' 'heartbroken,' 'scandal,' and 'calamitous' to describe the plan. Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 37-38.

¹⁶⁵ In March of 1969, President Nixon summarized this belief well in a meeting with Rabin. "Damn the oil! We can get it from other sources. We have to stand behind the decent nations in the Middle East. We will back you militarily, but the military escalation can't be allowed to go on endlessly. We must do something politically." Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 175.

¹⁶⁶ According to Rabin, he never asked the US specifically for permission to launch the deep strikes because he believed the US would not explicitly approve that. However, once they had begun, he wrote of a lunch with Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Joseph Sisco "There was no need for him to say it, he knew that I knew." Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 165.

¹⁶⁷ Shlaim and Tanter, "Decision Process," 493.

¹⁶⁸ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 163.

for additional Phantoms and Skyhawks by 30 days.¹⁶⁹ After that period, Nixon decided to further delay any decision on the sale of arms.¹⁷⁰ Nixon announced the policy publicly on March 23rd, after the de-escalation had begun, but it was clear to Israel for months beforehand that the US was interested in pursuing a ceasefire and was willing to use arms sales to Israel as a negotiating tool with the Soviet Union. However, the deep strikes continued through March 1970. In early April 1970, the Israeli head of operations in the IDF general staff even said that maintaining strikes against Egypt “along the canal *and in depth*.”¹⁷¹ Notably, the US never explicitly asked Israel to stop the deep strikes, before or after the discovery of the Soviet troops in Egypt.

Once the discovery of Soviet troops was made, the thoughts of the US played little in the minds of Israeli decision makers. On March 18th, the day Israel discovered the Soviets, Rabin continued to negotiate with the US about Phantom sales - the US was now floating the idea of replacing a limited number of Israeli losses without approving the sale of new ones.¹⁷² However, Rabin does not attribute the US position to the Israeli decision at all, in fact he writes that “at the end of March we were *forced* to call off our deep-penetration raids because of the [SA-3] batteries.”¹⁷³ The debate in the security cabinet between Dayan and Allon did not contain much if any reverence for American opinion either.

The absence of certain US support probably did influence Israel’s decision to de-escalate - but only because it compounded the military factors. However, even this was probably not decisive. Direct information on Israeli estimates of casualties before the de-escalation is

¹⁶⁹ Ibid, 168.

¹⁷⁰ Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 43.

¹⁷¹ Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 68.

¹⁷² Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 173. Eventually, this deal was agreed to. The US would replace up to eight Phantoms and twenty Skyhawks. This deal was developed as the war went on and will be discussed in more detail in the fourth case study. Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 170.

¹⁷³ Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 173. Emphasis added.

unavailable, so this point is easiest to demonstrate by examining the attrition rates Israel faced in the *summer* of 1970. As discussed earlier, Israel lost five Phantoms over the course of three weeks in early July 1970. At the same time, Israel was not able to destroy *any* SA-3 batteries.¹⁷⁴ An additional 25 phantoms may have made Israel more secure in the event of further escalation of the war, but if Israel continued to carry out deep strikes in March 1970, the sale would've only bought Israel about four months assuming an attrition rate of 5/3 of a plane per week. Allowing the attrition rate to vary somewhat does not change the calculation significantly.

The military factors of the Soviet intervention were the primary cause of Israel's de-escalation. These factors were the ability of the SA-3 to down Israeli planes and the risk of future military confrontation between Israel and the USSR that Israel could not win. There was some US pressure to get Israel to de-escalate, but this came mostly in the form of restrictions on weapons sales that did not significantly alter the strategic balance between Israel and Egypt/the USSR. Crucially, the fact that Israel did not value the ability to carry out deep strikes as much as its ability to hold the canal line enabled this to work. Once the Egyptians and Soviets began to push closer to the Canal, Israel did not back down again. As Dayan put it in April 1970:

A situation must prevail where we can hold the cease-fire line [on the Suez Canal]. And this hold on the cease-fire line demands action in the air and for this we have to insure [sic] that our planes can operate there. It is not Cairo, it is the cease-fire line, and I stress the distinction.¹⁷⁵

Thus, capabilities determined Israeli de-escalation when the threat to Israel was low, but threats determined it when the threat became higher.

¹⁷⁴ Korn, *Stalemate*, 231.

¹⁷⁵ Quoted in Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 154. Emphasis has been removed from the quoted passage that was not in the original. The ceasefire he is referring to is the ceasefire from the end of the Six-Day War.

V. CASE STUDY 4: NON-ESCALATION - ISRAEL DOESN'T ATTACK SAMs NEAR THE CANAL (AUGUST 1970)

Throughout the War of Attrition, maintaining air superiority in the Suez Canal zone (extending about 30 kilometers from the Canal into Egyptian territory) had been a top priority for Israel. In July 1969, Israel used its air force to stop an Egyptian advance which it believed would've threatened the Canal.¹⁷⁶ In April 1970, when it was forced to de-escalate due to Soviet intervention, Israel still maintained efforts to keep SAM sites outside of the Canal zone.¹⁷⁷ On August 7th, 1970, a ceasefire went into effect that Israel had agreed to on July 31st, barring any changes to the military status quo within 50 kilometers of the Canal.¹⁷⁸ Almost immediately, Egypt violated this agreement by moving SAM equipment closer to the Canal zone.¹⁷⁹ Israel discovered this violation the next day. Such a move clearly violated the ceasefire and threatened Israeli air superiority along the Canal, as Egyptian SAMs would now be able to shoot down Israeli planes *on the Israeli side of the Canal*. Israel, despite all of its previous efforts to prevent this exact situation from obtaining, did not attack the new SAM sites. Why did restraint prevail? This section will show that the purely military factors do not explain this decision - the military men all favored escalation.¹⁸⁰ However, unlike at previous points in the war, the civilian part of the Israeli government, led by Prime Minister Golda Meir, was largely responsible for the

¹⁷⁶ See Case Study 1.

¹⁷⁷ See Case Study 2.

¹⁷⁸ Yehuda Blanga, "The Path That Led to the Cease-Fire Ending the War of Attrition and the Stationing of Missiles at the Suez Canal," *Middle Eastern Studies* 48, no. 2, doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2012.653138, 193.

¹⁷⁹ Korn, *Stalemate*, 264.

¹⁸⁰ Some may object to the classification of this case as one regarding escalation. The primary reason for this would be that the War of Attrition was officially over after the ceasefire, and thus the decision to attack the sites would better be viewed as a decision to start a new war. However, two factors make this distinction less viable. First, Israeli decision-makers viewed the ceasefire with a lot of uncertainty. They were not sure it was going to last. Second, Egypt's deployment of the SAMs effectively a continuation of actions taken before the ceasefire.

decision to keep the ceasefire. She was motivated by military concerns, but was more future-oriented - keeping the ceasefire was the only way to guarantee that Israel would be supplied with weapons that would increase Israel's odds of winning a conflict should *Egypt* violate the ceasefire. In this case, those weapons were Electronic Countermeasures (ECM) and Shrike anti-radar missiles that would help attack Egyptian SAMs, as well as additional Phantoms. This case provides support for the hypothesis that escalation is made less likely by the presence of a solid defensive capability. It also provides an example of a policy from a larger state, the US, that succeeded in convincing an ally not to escalate a war. In the absence of the US transferring these capabilities to Israel, the threat of the SA-3s that the military establishment saw would likely have dominated the Israeli decision-making process and led to escalation.

A. Military Factors

Military factors would appear to make it difficult for Israel to consider escalating, but the top IDF generals and Defense Minister Moshe Dayan both favored strikes against the missile sites in the canal zone. Their logic was that high losses were worth it to secure the Canal zone. Therefore, the military factors do not explain why Israel decided against escalating. To show this, the purely military factors are examined, explaining how they might cause Israel to be deterred. Then, the logic of the Israeli military leaders is analyzed, showing that they thought escalation was worth it anyway.

Beginning in May 1970, the Soviet-Egyptian forces began efforts to install SAM batteries closer and closer to the Suez Canal, and fly MiG-21J patrols closer and closer to it.¹⁸¹ As discussed in case study three, 30 kilometers was a red line for Israel because it put the SAMs in

¹⁸¹ It is hard to date exactly when this push began, but most scholars agree on early May 1970. See Glassman, *Arms for the Arabs*, 78; Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 177.

range of the canal, meaning Israeli planes would run the risk of being shot down even on the Israeli side of the canal.¹⁸² The US warned the Soviet Union about placing batteries within 30 km of the canal on June 2nd, 1970, and they mostly obliged. The furthest forward-deployed battery until late July 1970 was 23 km from the canal. These deployments came to be referred to by Israelis as the “SAM-Box.”¹⁸³ During this period, the IAF consistently launched raids against suspected missile sites, attacking 8 in May and 106 in June.¹⁸⁴ However, the Soviet-Egyptian forces quickly developed techniques to push the SAMs eastward. Missile sites began to be deployed incrementally, so that one launcher would still be covered by those behind it. Dummy sites were also used. Most impressively, the Soviet-Egyptian forces perfected the art of quickly moving, preparing, and assembling missile sites overnight, so Israeli planes would not have a chance to discover them before they went online.¹⁸⁵ On the night of June 29th, several missile sites were activated at once and two Israeli Phantoms were shot down on the 30th.¹⁸⁶ On the 29th, Nasser made a visit to Moscow where he requested additional arms, including SA-6 mobile missile launchers, which would become key in the Yom Kippur War of 1973. Some SA-6s were deployed at Port Said during the summer of 1970, though the exact date of deployment is unknown.¹⁸⁷ In the three weeks after June 30th, Israel would lose three more Phantoms to the SAM-Box, in addition to the two lost on the 30th.¹⁸⁸ As July 1970 went on, the situation began to get even more dire. Soviet-piloted MiGs began to chase Israeli planes that had bombed Egyptian

¹⁸² Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 75.

¹⁸³ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 161-162

¹⁸⁴ Korn, *Stalemate*, 225.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 230.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Ginor and Remez, *The Soviet-Israeli War*, 177-178.

¹⁸⁸ Korn, *Stalemate*, 231.

positions in the canal zone on July 21st.¹⁸⁹ On August 5th, two days before the ceasefire would go into effect, Israeli Ambassador to the US Yitzhak Rabin reported to US National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger that three missile sites had been established within 10-20 km of the canal.¹⁹⁰

Why did Israel keep attacking Soviet-Egyptian positions until the ceasefire went into effect? The answer, as explained in case study three, is that they were concerned about the Bar-Lev line, another name for their fortifications on the Suez Canal, becoming vulnerable. The SA-3 had a range of 27 km, meaning that any deployments of those missiles within the canal zone meant planes on the Israeli side of the canal would be vulnerable to them.¹⁹¹ Foreign Minister Abba Eban testified before the Knesset in July 1970 that “The battle on the canal line is the battle to preserve the very existence of the State of Israel.”¹⁹² There were calls from middle-grade officers in the IDF, who had the most day-to-day experience on the line, to abandon it in the summer of 1970, but these were rejected by the rest of the military establishment.¹⁹³ The civilian side of the government also believed in the value of holding the canal. Soon after the events of June 30th, Prime Minister Meir sent a letter to Nixon asking for additional planes, noting that unless they were delivered “our basic position in the Canal Zone will come under increasing peril.”¹⁹⁴ The details of the ceasefire itself will be discussed below, but for now it is important to note that Israel only agreed to a ceasefire with a declared standstill provision preventing any

¹⁸⁹ Ibid, 232.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid, 262.

¹⁹¹ Khalidi, *The War of Attrition*, 75.

¹⁹² Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 360.

¹⁹³ Korn, *Stalemate*, 227.

¹⁹⁴ Quoted in Balanga, “The Path,” 187.

changes to the military status quo within 50 km of the canal (see Appendix III). Israel rejected an undeclared ceasefire when it was proposed by the Soviet Union in early March 1970.¹⁹⁵

The logic described above remained after the ceasefire was violated. There was debate about what to do within the Israeli military - but it mostly centered on whether to re-launch air raids or a full-scale ground war. This was not because the IDF underestimated the extent to which the new deployments hurt them - they in fact assessed that “three-fourths of the canal is now out of bounds to IDF planes.”¹⁹⁶ Dayan was a proponent of the former, while IDF Chief of Staff Haim Bar-Lev was in favor of the former.¹⁹⁷ Dayan met with US Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour in August 1970, in which he said that Israel could not accept a world where its side of the canal was vulnerable to a missile shield, and actually told Barbour he would recommend resuming the deep strikes, and was quoted as saying “to hell with restraint.”¹⁹⁸ Perhaps this was a moment of anger for Dayan and he wouldn’t have actually supported going back to deep strikes. He was the primary decision-maker behind the halting of the deep strikes in April 1970. However, it is clear he wanted to attack the SAM sites.

B. Arms Negotiations with the US

The military men did not have the final say in the decision not to attack the SAM sites. Prime Minister Meir had that responsibility. She was by no means a dove - she was very aware of the position that Israel would be put in by allowing the sites to be deployed so close to the canal. However, she made the judgement that Israel would be able to acquire specific weapons

¹⁹⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 170.

¹⁹⁶ Balanga, “The Path,” 196.

¹⁹⁷ Korn, *Stalemate*, 265-266.

¹⁹⁸ Blanga, “The Path,” 195-196. Dayan made it clear that he did not mean that nuclear weapons would be used. Ibid, 203n53.

systems from the US that improved Israel's ability to deal with the Soviet-Egyptian SAM network. These capabilities were additional Phantoms, ECM technology, and Shrike anti-radar missiles. To show this, the process that led to the ceasefire will first be analyzed. This is where the key evidence for Meir's beliefs is established. Second, US-Israeli talks post ceasefire will be analyzed, showing that the US made it clear that Meir was only going to get the weapons she believed Israel needed if the ceasefire was left intact.

On June 19th, 1970, US Secretary of State William Rogers issued a proposal to Israel and Egypt, as well as Jordan, to "stop shooting and start talking."¹⁹⁹ The 'stop shooting' portion referred to ending the War of Attrition, and 'start talking' meant participating in negotiations about a broader settlement to the Arab-Israeli conflict under the auspices of the United Nations and resolution 242, which is why Jordan was included. Meir rejected this plan outright, due to two factors. The first is that it mandated carrying out all parts of resolution 242, and the second is that it only proposed a 90-day ceasefire in the War of Attrition.²⁰⁰ Additionally, the future of US arms sales to Israel was uncertain at the time. In early January 1970, Israel placed a request for 25 additional Phantoms and 100 Skyhawks. This request was suspended for 30 days on January 30th.²⁰¹ On March 18th, 1970, Kissinger floated the idea of replacing a limited number of Israeli losses.²⁰² However, this deal was not implemented immediately. On June 20th, 1970, after Rogers sent his proposal to Israel, he explicitly offered to implement the replacement deal only if "negotiations...had started and showed signs of success."²⁰³ Nixon contradicted this message a day later, writing to Meir that there was no such linkage of the issues, and Israel would receive

¹⁹⁹ Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 46.

²⁰⁰ Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 180.

²⁰¹ Nachmias, *Transfer of Arms*, 42.

²⁰² Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs*, 173.

²⁰³ Quoted in Bar-Siman-Tov, *Israel, the Superpowers*, 181.

the planes it needed no matter what happened in the negotiations.²⁰⁴ On July 1st, 1970, after the two Phantoms were downed on June 30th, Nixon delivered a televised speech declaring that “It is in the United States’ interests to maintain the balance of power [in the Middle East], and we will maintain the balance of power.”²⁰⁵ He subsequently ordered a shipment of ECM to Israel.²⁰⁶ However, Meir was still not sure that the rest of the weapons would ever arrive, and thus rejected Rogers’ ceasefire plan.²⁰⁷

On July 22nd, 1970, Egypt accepted the US-backed ceasefire.²⁰⁸ Two days later, on July 24th, Nixon sent a message to Meir urging her to “respond affirmatively” to the deal, saying that the US would guarantee that Israel received weapons shipments and that the US would change its position on resolution 242, allowing Israel to maintain a military presence in the occupied territories at least until a larger peace deal.²⁰⁹ Meir asked for four points of clarification: she wanted Israel to receive more Phantoms, ECMs, and Shrike anti-radar missiles; for Nixon’s promises to become official US policy; for the 1969 version of the Rogers plan to be withdrawn, and for the US to veto anti-Israel resolution regarding the peace process at the UN security council. Nixon agreed to the first two.²¹⁰ This was sufficient for Meir, and the Israeli cabinet approved the ceasefire on July 31st, 1970.²¹¹ The Knesset approved the deal on August 4th by a vote of 66-28 with 9 abstentions, and it went into effect on August 7th.²¹² This shows that the *long-term* military factors were the most important in guiding Meir to agree to the ceasefire,

²⁰⁴ Balanga, “The Path,” 185.

²⁰⁵ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli Egyptian War of Attrition*, 182.

²⁰⁶ Korn, *Stalemate*, 230-231.

²⁰⁷ Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel’s Foreign Policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), 490.

²⁰⁸ Bar-Siman-Tov, *The Israeli-Egyptian War of Attrition*, 182.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 183-184.

²¹⁰ Brecher, *Decisions*, 495-496.

²¹¹ Officially, the cabinet approved an “affirmative reply” to Nixon’s request for one. They officially endorsed the ceasefire on August 4th, just before the Knesset did so. *Ibid.*, 496.

²¹² *Ibid.*, 496; 498.

while the military leaders were mostly focused on the *short-term*. The issue of the US position on resolution 242 was also a major factor, though Meir did not get everything she wanted in regard to that. It should also be noted that the military establishment supported the ceasefire at this stage, largely because of the 50 km standstill provision. Dayan even voted in favor of it.²¹³

Why did Meir maintain her position about the ceasefire even after the Egyptian violations? The military men changed their mind, so why not Meir? The evidence shows that the US conditioned the aid that Meir received in exchange for accepting the ceasefire on Israel's continuing to abide by it. One week after the ceasefire, on August 14th, US Assistant Secretary of Defense David Packard told Rabin that the Shrikes, ECMs, and other weapons to be supplied to Israel should only be used within 50 km of the Canal, and only in the event that Egypt attacks Israel.²¹⁴ Barbour was instructed on August 17th to tell Israel that it should "set aside its allegations against Egypt" and move to participate in the UN-backed talks.²¹⁵ Meir did not set these allegations aside, but instead brought them up at the UN-backed talks in September 1970.²¹⁶ The US also refused to publicly back Israel's accusation that Egypt had violated the ceasefire, even though it knew that Egypt did. On August 19th, 1970, the US issued a statement saying that "there is some evidence that [forward deployment of SAMs] was continued beyond the cease-fire deadline, though our evidence on this is not conclusive."²¹⁷ Three days later, the US went privately to Egypt with "incontrovertible evidence" that the ceasefire had been violated.²¹⁸ There is no "smoking gun" that shows exactly what Meir's thought process was post-

²¹³ Ibid, 498.

²¹⁴ Balanga, "The Path," 196.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ Ibid, 199.

²¹⁷ Korn, *Stalemate*, 266.

²¹⁸ Ibid, 266-267.

ceasefire. However, her response to Nixon's July 24th message is a very strong indication of her thinking immediately before. US policy reinforced everything that led to her conclusions in the post-ceasefire discussions.

VI. CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Threats-Capabilities theory proposes three main hypotheses: escalation is more likely when threats increase, escalation is more likely when offensive capabilities increase, and de-escalation is more likely when defensive capabilities increase. The effect of the increase in threat will be magnified when the threatened state's defensive capabilities are low or its offensive capabilities are high, and when its offensive capabilities are higher the level of escalation will tend to be higher.

Threats-Capabilities theory explains the four cases analyzed in the War of Attrition well. In the first case, Israel involved the IAF in the war in June 1969 because the threat to it increased. Initially, its offensive capabilities were low, and it restrained its escalation somewhat. After its offensive capabilities increased with the delivery of the F-4 Phantoms, the deep strikes begun. In the second case, Egypt was placed in a similar predicament – it escalated because the threat to it increased. The Soviet Union made a conscious choice not to provide Egypt with advanced long-range bombers, which might've encouraged further escalation. In the third case, the effects of Soviet intervention manifested – Israel de-escalated because of the increase of Egypt's defensive capabilities. In the fourth case, Israel was once again faced with an increased threat, and in the absence of the capability to defend against the threat it nearly escalated. However, the promise of those defensive capabilities from the US caused Israel to not escalate.

US policy makers can take three main lessons from Threats-Capabilities theory. First, if it provides its allies with offensive capabilities during a war, they should not be surprised if that war ends up escalating. This could even be the case during a crisis or blockade scenario as well. For example, providing Israel with advanced aerial refueling technology may allow Israel to escalate a conflict with Iran. Second, in regions where stability is a primary US interest, policymakers should not worry too much about defensive capabilities being provided to any state. For example, a Russian-Iranian agreement on air defense is likely to decrease the probability of escalation in a crisis between Israel and Iran and may not be something to worry about. Third, providing US allies with purely defensive capabilities is likely to restrain escalation. For example, improving Taiwan's anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities will make Chinese escalation less likely in the event of a crisis over the Taiwan Strait.

Appendix I - Soviet Replacement of Egyptian Armaments After the Six-Day War

<u>Egypt/UAR Air Force (July 1967)</u>	<u>Egypt/UAR Air Force (July 1968)</u>	<u>Egypt/UAR Air Force (July 1969)</u>	<u>Egypt/UAR Air Force (July 1970)</u>	<u>Egypt/UAR Air Force (July 1971)</u>
20 Il-28 light jet bombers	40 Il-28 light jet bombers	30 Il-28 light jet bombers	28 Il-28 light jet bombers	25 Il-28 light jet bombers
100 MiG-21 Interceptors	110 MiG-21 Interceptors	100 MiG-21 Interceptors	150 MiG-21 Interceptors	200 MiG-21 Interceptors
45 MiG-19 all-weather fighters	80 MiG-19 all-weather fighters	N/A	N/A	N/A
60 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter-bombers	120 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter-bombers	120 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter-bombers	150 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter-bombers	200 MiG-15 and MiG-17 fighter-bombers
40 Il-14 and An-12 medium transports	40 Il-14, 20 An-12, and 8 C-45/C-47 transports	About 40 Il-14, 20 An-12	About 40 Il-14, 20 An-12	About 40 Il-14, 20 An-12
30 Mi-4 and Mi-6 helicopters	50 Mi-4, Mi-6, and Mi-8 helicopters	50 Mi-1, Mi-4, Mi-6, and Mi-8 helicopters	70 Mi-1, Mi-4, Mi-6, and Mi-8 helicopters	140 Mi-1, Mi-4, Mi-6, and Mi-8 helicopters
150 MiG and Yak jet trainers	150 MiG and Yak, and Delfin jet trainers	150 MiG and Yak, and Delfin jet trainers	150 MiG and Yak, and Delfin jet trainers	150 MiG and Yak, and Delfin jet trainers
120 SA-2 SAMs - deployed in 20 batteries of 6	180 SA-2 SAMs - deployed in 30 batteries of 6	300 SA-2 SAMs - deployed in 30 batteries of 6	250 SA-2 SAMs - deployed in 30 batteries of 6	420 SA-2 SAMs - deployed in 70 batteries of 6
N/A	10 TU-16 medium jet bombers	12 TU-16 medium jet bombers	15 TU-16 medium jet bombers	18 TU-16 medium jet bombers
N/A	40 SU-7 all-weather fighter-bombers	90 SU-7 all-weather fighter-bombers	105 SU-7 all-weather fighter-bombers	110 SU-7 all-weather fighter-bombers
N/A	N/A	N/A	25 Soviet SA-3 sites, each with 4 launchers	65 Soviet SA-3 sites, each with 4 launchers
N/A	N/A	N/A	100 Soviet MiG-21J interceptors	100 Soviet MiG-21J interceptors

Data compiled from *The Military Balance*, vol. 67, no. 1, 1968; vol. 68, no. 1, 1969; vol. 69, no. 1, 1970; vol. 70, no. 1, 1971; vol. 71, no. 1, 1972. All arms transfers to Egypt from 1967-1970, with three exceptions, originated from the USSR or Czechoslovakia. These three exceptions were orders of non-combat aircraft from Spain and France made in 1959 but completed in 1969 and an order of six naval ships from Syria made in 1969 and completed in 1970. See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Arms Transfers Database*, (March 11, 2024), distributed by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://doi.org/10.55163/SAFC1241>.

Appendix II - Israeli Air Force, 1967-1971

<u>Israel Air Force (July 1967)</u>	<u>Israel Air Force (July 1968)</u>	<u>Israel Air Force (July 1969)</u>	<u>Israel Air Force (July 1970)</u>	<u>Israel Air Force (July 1971)</u>
15 Vantour Light Bombers	15 Vantour Light Bombers	15 Vantour Light Bombers	12 Vantour Light Bombers	10 Vantour Light Bombers
65 Mirage IIIC Fighter/Interceptor	65 Mirage IIIC Fighter/Interceptor	65 Mirage IIIC Fighter/Interceptor	60 Mirage IIIC Fighter/Interceptor	60 Mirage IIIC Fighter/Interceptor
25 Super Mystere Fighter/Interceptor	15 Super Mystere Fighter/Interceptor	12 Super Mystere Fighter/Interceptor	10 Super Mystere Fighter/Interceptor	9 Super Mystere Fighter/Interceptor
25 Mystere IVA Fighter-Bomber	35 Mystere IVA Fighter-Bomber	35 Mystere IVA Fighter-Bomber	30 Mystere IVA Fighter-Bomber	27 Mystere IVA Fighter-Bomber
50 Ouragan fighter-bomber	45 Ouragan fighter-bomber	35 Ouragan fighter-bomber	30 Ouragan fighter-bomber	30 Ouragan fighter-bomber
50 Magister jet trainers - can be used in ground strike	65 Magister jet trainers - can be used in ground strike	65 Magister jet trainers - can be used in ground strike	85 Magister jet trainers - can be used in ground strike	85 Magister jet trainers - can be used in ground strike
~35 Noratlas and Stratocruiser transports	18 Noratlas, 5 stratocruiser, 12 C-47 transports	2 Squadrons of transports	18 Noratlas, 5 stratocruiser, 10 C-47 transports	15 Noratlas, 10 stratocruiser, 10 C-47 and C-46 transports
~40 Helicopters - S-58, Alouettes, and Super Frelons	25 S-58, 15 H-13, 5 Alouette, 6 Super Frelon Helicopters	25 S-58, 15 H-13, 5 Alouette, 10 Super Frelon Helicopters	25 AB-205, 8 CH-53, 15 H-34, 5 Alouette, 12 Super Frelon Helicopters	20 Alouette, 12 Super Frelon Helicopters, 8 CH-53s, 25 AB-205s
Some light aircraft, including Piper Cubs	Some light aircraft, including Piper Cubs	Some light aircraft, including 60 Piper Cubs	N/A	N/A
~50 Launchers with Hawk SAMs	~50 Launchers with Hawk SAMs	~100 Launchers with Hawk SAMs	2 Battalions of Hawk SAMs	8 SAM Batteries with 48 HAWK [sic]
N/A	48 A-4E Skyhawks	48 A-4E Skyhawks	67 A-4E Skyhawks	72 A-4E/H Skyhawks
N/A	N/A	N/A	36 F-4E Phantoms	75 F-4E Phantoms

Data compiled from *The Military Balance*, vol. 67, no. 1, 1968; vol. 68, no. 1, 1969; vol. 69, no. 1, 1970; vol. 70, no. 1, 1971; vol. 71, no. 1, 1972. Most arms transfers to Israel from 1967-1970 originated in the US, but Israel also received arms from several European countries and some others. See Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, *Arms Transfers Database*, (March 11, 2024), distributed by Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://doi.org/10.55163/SAFC1241>.

Appendix III - Full Text of the Ceasefire Agreement/Rogers Plan B (Effective August 7th)

- A. Israel and the UAR²¹⁹ will observe a ceasefire effective at 2200 GMT Friday, August 7th.
- B. Both sides will stop all incursions and all firing, on the ground and in the air, across the ceasefire line.
- C. Both sides will refrain from changing the military status quo within zones extending 50 kilometers to the east and the west of the ceasefire line. Neither side will introduce or construct any new military installations in these zones. Activities within the zones will be limited to the maintenance of existing installations at their present sites and positions and to the rotation and supply of forces presently within the zones.
- D. For the purposes of verifying observance of the ceasefire, each side will rely on its own national means, including reconnaissance aircraft, which will be free to operate without interference up to 10 kilometers from the ceasefire line on its own side of the line.
- E. Each side may avail itself as appropriate of all United Nations machinery in reporting alleged violations by each other of the ceasefire and of the military standstill.
- F. Both sides will abide by the Geneva Convention of 1949 relative to the treatment of prisoners of war and will accept the assistance of the International Committee of the Red Cross in carrying out their obligations under that Convention.²²⁰

²¹⁹ UAR stands for United Arab Republic, the formal name of Egypt during this period.

²²⁰ United Nations, *The Ceasefire/Standstill Proposal*, 1970, <https://www.un.org/unispa/document/auto-insert-209696/>