

Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume XIX, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967

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Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency/1/

Washington, May 23, 1967.

/1/Source: Johnson Library, National Security File, Memos to the President, Walt W. Rostow, Vol. 28. Secret; No Foreign Dissem. The memorandum is unsigned, and bears no drafting information. It was sent to the President with a brief covering memorandum from Walt Rostow stating that two memoranda from Helms, which the President had requested that morning, were attached. The second memorandum has not been identified.

SUBJECT

Overall Arab and Israeli Military Capabilities

1. The judgment of the intelligence community is that Israeli *ground forces* "can maintain internal security, defend successfully against simultaneous Arab attacks on all fronts, launch limited attacks simultaneously on all fronts, or hold on any three fronts while mounting successfully a major offensive on the fourth." *In the air*, the judgment is less clear: the Israelis "probably could defeat the Egyptian air force if Israel's air facilities were not damaged beyond repair."
2. Those judgments rest essentially on the proposition that the quality of Israel's military leadership, its ability to organize operations and maintain its equipment in a high state of readiness, and the high morale and intelligence of the individual Israeli ground soldier will make up for Israel's quantitative inferiority in men and equipment. The Israelis have consistently stressed intensive training, with emphasis on armor, standardization of weapons, rapid and reliable communications, and a very strong tactical intelligence effort. Egyptian capabilities in these areas appear to be inferior.
3. Moreover, in the air, the Israelis have been acutely conscious of the difficulty of defending their air facilities, and have made strenuous efforts to overcome the fact that their bases are very short warning time from the Arab borders. They have "hardened" their fields with dispersed pens, for example. Israeli pilots and tactics are considered superior, and, in terms of *operationally assigned* fighter aircraft rather than total inventory, Israel has a slight edge--256 to 222.
4. Israeli planning is based on a short war, conducted by ground forces with air cover. If this assumption should prove wrong, Israel might well be in trouble, since the Arabs' quantitative superiority would come into play. At M+48 hours, for example, Israel would have 280,000 men vs. the Arabs' 117,000 deployed in the vicinity of the Israeli borders. But the *total* strength of the Arab armies is nearly 500,000, vs. the same 280,000 on the Israeli side.
5. This is not to say that the rout of the Egyptians in 1956 will be repeated. The Egyptian forces have improved substantially in the past eleven years, and they have acquired considerable operational know-how by rotating combat units in Yemen. Nevertheless, **we consider that the Israeli forces have retained an over-all superiority.**