

Press Conference by Defence Minister Moshe Dayan- 6 October 1973 Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, International Relations, Historical Documents, Vol. 1-2. 1947-1974.

3. Press Conference by Defence Minister Moshe Dayan, 6 October 1973.

At 2030 hours, the Minister of Defence held a press conference which was televised. Following is Mr. Dayan's opening statement:

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I want to make a brief opening statement and then to answer as many questions as I have information to provide you with.

I suppose everyone knows by this time that the Syrian and Egyptian attack started today, at ten minutes to 2 this afternoon. We had information and we suspected that such an attack would take place, so we were faced with the dilemma of whether to open fire first and, of course, thereby to obtain a very important advantage, or not to do so and lose this military advantage, but make sure that the picture will be clear, the true one - that the Egyptians and the Syrians started the war - and this is the start of an all-out war again.

We decided to take the second course, taking into account the military outcome of that course, and only this morning we started mobilizing our reserves. Before that we informed other governments of what we thought was going to happen, that is to say, of the Egyptian and Syrian attack.

I want to explain one thing about our general attitude or specific approach to the question. We face a great number of forces on both fronts, Egyptian and Syrian. Now and again they reinforce their forces along the line, sometimes they are more reluctant. But if we want to maintain normal life in this country we have to take the risk of not holding the line, especially the Egyptian line, with many forces, because when we say forces that means the young people of Israel, and if we do that with a great number for many years, in this case for six years, then we cannot have normal life in the country. So, the way we do it is to take the risk of something similar to what happened today, that we would have to follow up later, after the start of the war, with small forces on the spot at the start, and mobilize our reserves and eventually reach a sufficient number of forces - and I believe we shall have enough. We do not have enough men today, at the beginning - that is, enough forces to meet the enemy and to control the area there. That is one problem we have to face, and this is the answer.

The second one I already referred to, namely, whether to start or not to start a preventive war. In this case we considered it and it was a decision of the Government not to strike first, even though we were sure that they would strike - in order to have that political, or whatever you would call it, advantage at the expense of the military

advantage. I think it was the right decision. I think both of them are correct decisions. The first, not to keep many forces there for too long a time, and the second, in this case today, unlike six years ago, not to strike first, not to start with the preventive strike, because we are not in the position that we were in before. Had it been the lines we had before - Latrun, 10 or 15 miles from Lydda, 25 kms. from the sea, and a divided Jerusalem and so on - we could not have taken such risks. But, after all, Sinai is far away and we can allow ourselves such a tactic or strategy: to say "Never mind, we can fight and even if at the beginning the Egyptians manage to cross the Canal and some of them did manage to cross the Canal - and even if we shall have to evacuate or lose some positions, it is far away and it is a big desert, and in order to defend it you have to keep a lot of forces or to start a war again and again, which we do not want." This is the second course, the philosophy.

What happened today on both fronts is that in the North I think we lost a position. We did have some casualties, not significant ones. That is to say, after the first day of fighting I think our position there is well established. None of the settlements suffered in a significant way. All the women and children were evacuated. We have some forces there and eventually we shall have the mobilized reserve forces. The Syrians lost much more heavily than we did and I feel sure that their plan, their objective - to kick us out of the Golan Heights - will fail.

But, as in Sinai, there, too, we have the two stages. The first when the war starts and the second when we have the complete number of our forces after bringing over the mobilized reserves, which takes time - days or hours depending on where it is. Then we can conduct the war the way we like, and I believe we can get to that point eventually. Not today. The half day today was their beginning, their initiative. They started, they had the initiative. We had to stop them and mobilize the reserves, bring them over, which takes time. I believe we shall manage to do it. And the sum of the first day is that they have not had any real gains in the Golan Heights.

Now, the situation in Sinai. Objectively, to begin with, it is much different. It is a much bigger scale, a big, big desert with the long line of the Suez Canal, and there are a lot of places where people can cross. It is not a continuous line that you are holding, even with numerous forces, and certainly not with small forces, so I would have been surprised if they had not managed to cross in some places or to establish bridges.

They have crossed in a few places and we have lost a few positions, and we had casualties there. I suppose during the night they will have more forces crossing and tomorrow morning we shall see more Egyptians on our side of the Suez Canal. We shall not sit quietly either and when we pass this stage, between the start of the war and the full reinforcement of our forces, with the armour and other forces that should be mobilized and supported over there, then we can start the real war the way we see it and not only try and stop them.

As I said, this is our answer to the problem of a small country, with three million people, that have to live under such conditions and at the same time want to have a normal life here. That is our answer. I believe in this, and I suppose that when the end of this battle or war comes we shall be proved right.