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The Military Backdrop to Egyptian-Israeli  
Peace Negotiations

Preface

This paper begins with a brief review of the Intelligence Community's assessment of the current and likely future Arab-Israeli military balance. It then outlines the military prospects of Egypt and Israel from the perspective of conservative military planners in each country. This "worst case" perspective provides insights into the pressures on both Sadat and Begin to reach an agreement.

US Assessment of the Arab-Israeli Military Balance

1. Israel has increased its margin of military superiority over its Arab adversaries since the 1973 war. It could engage the Arabs in hostilities up to and including full-scale war and decisively defeat them on all fronts.

--The exceptional operational effectiveness of Israel's armed forces underlies its military superiority. This results from advantages in the quality of manpower, of equipment, and of technical and support infrastructure.

2. Despite their relative military weakness, the Arabs retain military options.

--An Arab attack on Israel would have two goals: to improve the Arab political position by breaking a stalemate in negotiations and to hurt Israel in terms of both casualties and economic disruption. If they employed their military option, however, the Arabs would risk a major defeat and loss of those territorial gains achieved as a result of the 1973 war.

3. Over the next five years, Israel almost certainly will retain a significant margin of military superiority. Yet it must be recognized that over the long-term the Arabs may increase their military capabilities to the point where achieving a military victory would become significantly more costly for Israel than in the past.

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- Concern over the increasingly costly nature of modern warfare underlies Israeli efforts to retain overwhelming military superiority (particularly through an uninterrupted flow of US weapons and technology) in order to deter an Arab attack.

### Egyptian Military Prospects

1. A conservative Egyptian military planner would conclude that the armed forces, particularly in the near term, face a bleak future relative to Israel.

- a. Egypt's armed forces are in worse shape today than in 1973 to engage in major hostilities with Israel.
  - The ratio of major weapon systems in Egyptian versus Israeli inventories is less favorable for Egypt than in 1973.
  - The operational readiness of the Egyptian armed forces has been degraded by the virtual cutoff of Soviet military and technical assistance.
  - The acquisition of new Western military equipment will be highly dependent on steady Saudi financial support, and its integration into the armed forces will be at best a gradual and difficult process.
- b. Disputes within the Arab world make support of any Egyptian military moves problematic.
  - Syria is preoccupied with the volatile situation in Lebanon, and its military posture on the Golan front has been seriously weakened by its large commitment of troops to Lebanon.
  - Egyptian relations with both Libya and Iraq are strained, making problematic their dispatch of expeditionary forces or military equipment in the event of renewed hostilities.

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- c. Egyptian military weakness makes renewed hostilities more risky for Cairo.
    - Egypt's chances of achieving a significant measure of surprise are reduced by the fact that the Israelis, as a result of their 1973 experience, would feel strong pressure to launch a preemptive attack should Egypt mass its forces.
    - A severe defeat would leave Egypt militarily impotent for at least several years and could result in a change in government in Cairo.
  - d. Even long-term improvements in Egyptian military capabilities may not increase Cairo's leverage on Israel.
    - They might prompt Israel to initiate hostilities in order to disrupt Egyptian military programs.
    - Israel retains the option of placing greater reliance on nuclear weapons as a deterrent.
2. President Sadat and his military advisers recognize the bleak prospects for the Egyptian armed forces.
- a. Sadat might, however, reluctantly choose the military option if he felt that satisfactory progress on negotiations was no longer possible.
  - b. Prior to undertaking military action, Sadat would probably attempt to coordinate his planning with other key Arab states and to improve his military posture through acquiring either Libyan or Soviet military assistance.

#### Israeli Military Prospects

1. Despite the current superiority of the armed forces, a conservative Israeli military planner would also have a bleak view of military prospects.

- a. Israel has two specific military vulnerabilities.

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- It is extremely sensitive to suffering high casualties because of its relatively small population. The increasing lethality of modern weapons makes it more likely that Israel would sustain higher casualties in new large-scale hostilities than in 1973 (when the number of soldiers killed was more than three times the number lost in 1967).
  - The armed forces must rely on the large-scale mobilization of reserves in order to engage in other than limited military operations. Mobilizations can cause significant disruption of the Israeli economy. Israel could not afford to undertake frequent mobilizations in response to threatening Arab military moves intended to "taunt" Israel.
- b. Over the long-term, Israel faces some worrisome prospects.
- Further significant expansion in the size of the Israeli armed forces, in response to Arab increases, will be difficult due to manpower limitations.
  - Arab military improvements, coupled with a strong determination to inflict high costs on Israel (despite disproportionate costs to themselves), could make Israel the real loser in a future war even if it achieved a tactical victory.
  - Israel is burdened by a defense budget that is 30 percent of the state budget and could become even larger if tensions with its Arab neighbors are not relieved.
  - Israel's standing within the international community was severely weakened, and its dependence on the US for military and economic assistance was substantially increased, in the aftermath of the 1973 war. Both these conditions would likely be enhanced in the event of renewed hostilities, particularly if accompanied by an Arab oil embargo.

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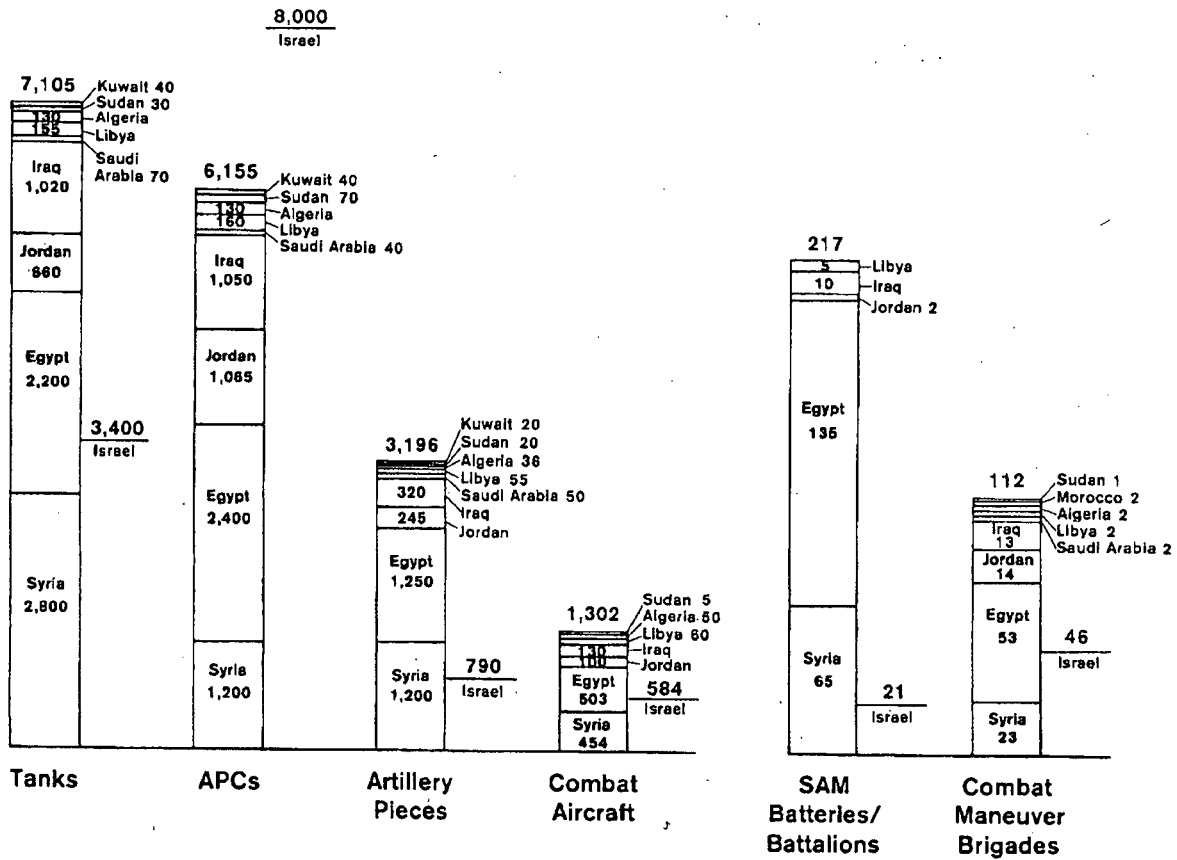
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--The continual threat of war has a corrosive effect on the quality of Israeli life. There was a significant drop in immigration, and a significant increase in emigration, after the 1973 war. Another war would likely have an even greater impact in this regard. A continuation of tensions, or another war, probably would also increase political tensions within Israel.

2. Begin is aware of these serious problems, but the weight that they carry in his thinking is countered by his sense of Jewish history and suspicion of his Arab adversaries.

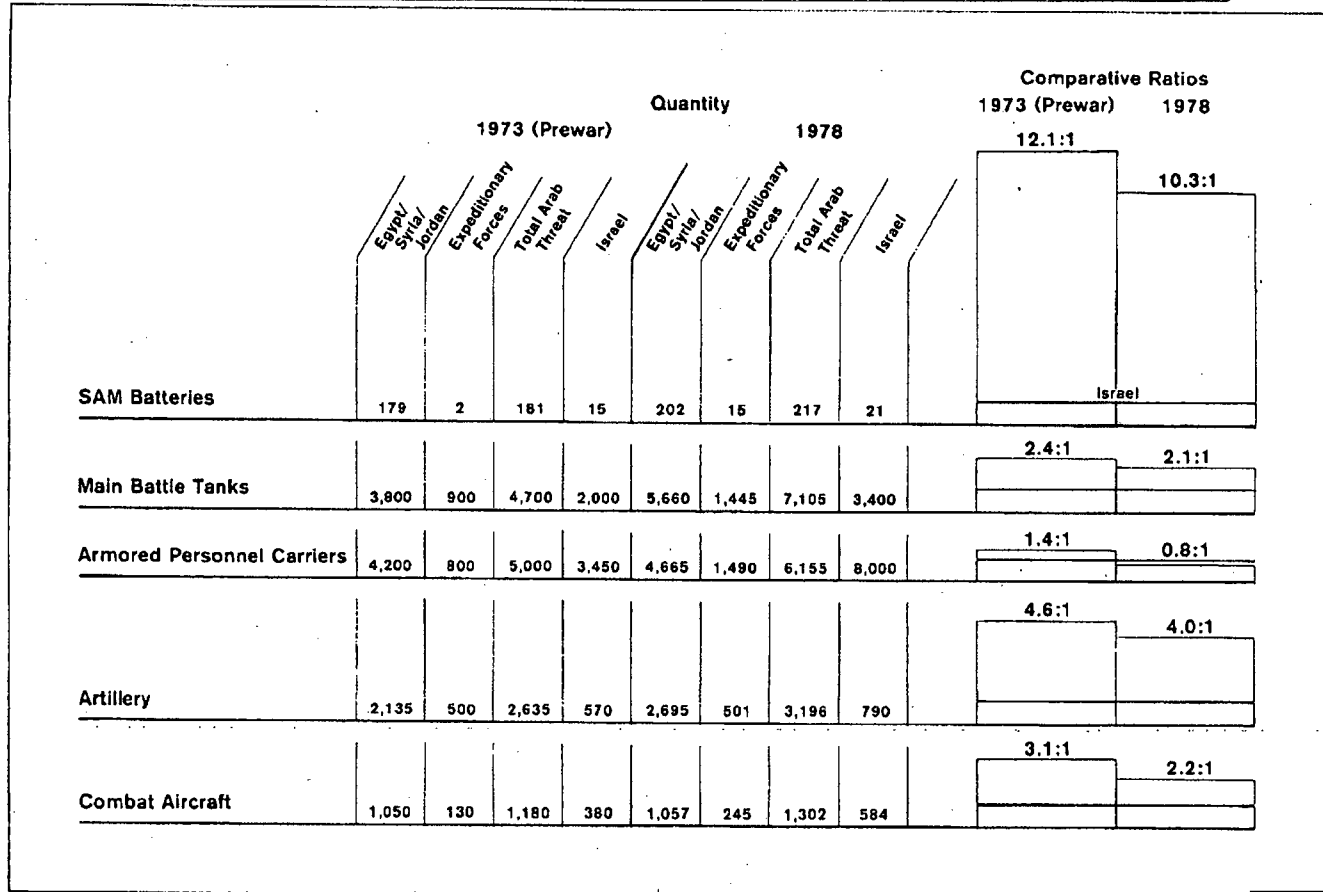
- a. He views the Arabs as irredentists whose goals threaten the existence of Israel as a Jewish state.
- b. While recognizing analytically that Israel is militarily strong and could, with adequate safeguards, safely withdraw from current military positions, he remains [REDACTED] committed to a particular concept of the historical land of Israel.
- c. Despite the military risks, he will not be swayed from opposing an agreement which does not clearly safeguard what he views as Israeli national interests.

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