

**The Battle for the Golan Heights in the
Yom Kippur War of 1973:
A Battle Analysis**

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Abstract

The battle for the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur war took place in October of 1973. On the 6th of October, three Syrian divisions streamed across the Purple Line and into Israel. The Israeli tanks were outnumbered almost ten to one. After crossing the antitank ditch, the Syrians pressed home the attack and reached a point only ten kilometers from the Sea of Galilee. With almost no strategic depth, the Israelis beat back the Syrian invaders and went on the offensive themselves. They drove deep into Syria and towards Damascus, stopping only after their heavy artillery came within range of the capital city itself. By the cease-fire on October 22nd, 772 Israelis and 3,100 Syrians were dead. The Israelis won this battle overcoming numerical inferiority and the surprise of the attack because of superior gunnery, better maneuver, and better flexibility. The Syrians lost the battle because of inability to mass and maneuver effectively.

Introduction

The Yom Kippur War in October of 1973 was the third in a series of wars waged against Israel by her Arab neighbors. Beginning with a surprise attack on October 6th, 1973, Israel squared off in a dual-fronted, defensive war against Syria in the North and Egypt in the South. This battle analysis will focus primarily on the battle for the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria. The principles of war spelled out in the Army's Field Manual 3-0, *Operations*, will be my primary instruments in analyzing and dissecting the battle. Some of the resources used in this paper are Jerry Asher's *Duel for the Golan*, former Minister of Defense and President of Israel Chaim Herzog's *The War of Atonement*, Abraham Rabinovich's *The Yom Kippur War*, and Avigdor Kahalani's personal account of the battle *The Heights of Courage*.

Strategic Setting

Beginning in October of 1972, Syria's President Hafez al-Assad authorized a mini-war against Israel. This authorization was largely a result of the low-ebb of Syrian prestige in the Arab world. The concept of "battle days" as they came to be called consisted of limited engagements against fixed Israeli positions by Syrian infantry, tanks,

and artillery forces.¹ These attacks were measured and limited so as not to entice serious punitive attacks by the Israeli's. There was no international outcry because of this state of "normal war" since it was seen as the normal communication of hostility between antagonistic neighbors.

These battle days struck a very resonate chord in the Arab world. As Syrian prestige rose with these attacks against the Zionists, Egyptian hegemony in the Middle East waned. Pressure continued to mount on the shoulders of Egyptian President Anwar as-Sadat with every new Syrian initiative, and he became aware of a need to bolster his power base with some sort of offensive against Israel. Sadat launched one abortive battle day in 1972, one that resulted in no Israeli casualties. As Sadat entertained the idea of more widespread conflict with Israel, it became immediately apparent that in October of 1972 the Egyptian military was almost wholly unprepared for a war.²

It was in January of 1973 that one of Assad's battle days brought the normal exchanges between hostile nations to a boiling-point. While accounts on the ground reported less than fifty killed, Radio Damascus reported to the Syrian people that in the course of the fighting five hundred civilians had been killed along with herds of livestock while bombs induced more than a hundred miscarriages and destroyed better than twenty homes.³ In the face of this propaganda, a galvanized Syrian public and a great part of the Arabic-speaking world called for war.

In the face of such outcries and condemnation for inaction from Assad, Cairo attempted to control the spin but could do little to alter the desire of the Arabs for war. Sadat therefore invited Assad to Cairo in late April where he laid out Egyptian plans to

¹ Asher, Jerry. Duel for the Golan. USA: William Morrow and Co., 1987. p. 45

² Asher, 46

³ Asher, 47

cross the Suez and go to war with Israel. Because of the need for favorable tides and a full moon, a set of dates were possible with the earliest in May and the latest in October.⁴ Syria was at Egypt's mercy regarding the date of the attack. Possessing the list of possible dates for the attack, Syria would have to sit and wait for Egypt's call as to the exact date.

This forced Assad and the Syrians' collective hand. Faced with a major Egyptian offensive against Israel, Assad had to choose between going to war with little to gain or risk the consequences of inaction as Egypt regained prestige in the Arab world. While the alliance between Syria and Egypt clearly benefited the Egyptians, this was far less the case for Syria. Egyptian war aims were the retaking of the Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip. His plan called for a military opening to the war and a political closure.⁵ Syria's aim was the retaking of the Golan Heights. Another aim for Syria lay in having the Egyptians preoccupied with a war with Israel. Syria had debts with other Arab states and scores she wanted to settle. A war with Israel would keep Egypt too busy to interfere with Assad's ambitions in this arena.

The Syrian military was ready for this war. There had been vast improvements made since the debacle of the Six-Day War in 1967. By 1973, universal conscription had pulled twenty percent of the eligible male population was serving on active duty while twenty percent of Syria's GDP was devoted to military spending. The officer corps had been professionalized and commissions granted on the basis of competence rather than politics and favoritism. Discipline was tight and ethnic, social, and religious tensions were minimal within the Army. Syria had five permanent divisions capable of fielding

⁴ Asher, 48

⁵ Asher, 50

2,000 tanks and over 1,000 artillery pieces and mortars of 120mm or larger. In total, there was the equivalent of seven divisions on their side of the 1967 cease-fire line.⁶ Coupled with the continuous supply of new Soviet equipment and the most fanatical hatred of Israel in the Arab world, the Syrian force was extremely formidable. The Egyptian force had likewise been revamped since its most recent defeat in 1967.⁷ Armed with the latest Soviet equipment, the five Egyptian divisions fielded for this war contained more than 100,000 men, 1,350 tanks, and 2,000 artillery pieces and heavy mortars.⁸

Facing this was a far smaller Israeli force. The Israeli military drastically underestimated the militaries of both Syria and Egypt.⁹ This was largely a result of their successes. Having so soundly defeated the Arabs in the Six-Day War, they looked at these new armies as the same as previous ones. More than half the defense budget was now invested in the air force. Other members of the combined arms team were thus starved for funds. Israel was divided into three combatant commands. These were the Northern, Central, and Southern Commands. With only 450 troops manning the strongpoints along the Suez front and only 44 artillery pieces, there were only 290 tanks in the Sinai.¹⁰ Northern Command had only four battalions and less than 200 tanks along the fifty-miles of the "Purple Line" as the cease-fire line was called. Also burdening the Israeli military was its inability to fight a prolonged battle. Israel's much smaller population could not absorb large numbers of casualties just as her economy could not support a sustained conflict. The strength of the Israeli armed forces was superior

⁶ Asher, 52

⁷ Rabinovich, Abraham. The Yom Kippur War. New York: Schocken, 2004. p. 58

⁸ Rabinovich, 3

⁹ Rabinovich, 125

¹⁰ Rabinovich, 4

training paired with a complete lack of options- either fight and win quickly or cease to be.

Operational Setting

The Syrian military objective in the war was the retaking of the imposing Golan Heights. The Golan offers a commanding view of both Israel and Syria, and is the most dominant terrain in the area. From the Golan, Syrian artillery would be able to fire deep into the agricultural heartland of Israel unmolested. The Israeli's chief line of defense on the border would be taken along with the inherent advantage of the commanding terrain. Similarly removed would be Israel's key electronic warfare post on the Hermon. Called "the eyes of Israel," the Israelis were from this vantage point able to see from Haifa in the East to Damascus in the west.¹¹ This offered not only excellent observation, but also a natural place for radar equipment and other sensitive electronics.

The Syrians were seriously hampered in their planning by subservience to the Egyptian planners. The original Syrian plan for operation *Al-Owda* called for attacks at dawn with a no bombing of Israeli targets outside the Golan save for select sites in the Jordan River valley. The Syrians envisioned retaking the Golan in forty-eight hours, effectively an enlarged and lengthened battle day, well short of the all-out war the Syrians believed would outrage Israeli leadership. The alliance with Egypt forced Syria to move their attack back to the mid-afternoon. Not only that, but the Egyptians would provide only five-days notice as to the date of the attack itself.

While the Syrian minister of war had been confident in the success of *Al-Owda*, there was far less confidence in the Egyptian plan for operation *Badhr*. Soviet advisors volunteered to the Syrians that the Israelis would crush any attempt by the Egyptians to

¹¹ Herzog, Chaim. The War of Atonement, London: Greenhill Books, 1975 69

cross the Suez in under an hour leaving the Syrians to face the entirety of the Israeli military alone.¹² *Badhr*'s objective to the Syrian president was thus avoiding defeat and safeguarding Assad's regime from coups and other threats rather than the *Al-Owda* aim of capturing the Golan. Indeed, planning considerations relating to the protection of Assad's regime would profoundly affect the future achievement of the Syrian military objective. The *Al-Owda* plan had called for isolating the Golan from reinforcements, disrupting support and command facilities, and the overpowering of Israeli positions on the Golan before they could be strengthened.¹³ The *Badhr* plan lost some of these aspects. While *Al-Owda* included a pre-dawn infiltration of Syrian commandos to capture Israeli electronic warfare posts, *Badhr* lacked this aspect. The five elite battalions of the 1st Commando Group along with a full brigade of men, the most elite and well-equipped units Syria possessed, were lost in the change to *Badhr* that included the decision to withhold some of the best troops in Damascus as a failsafe.¹⁴ The remainder of this full brigade comprising the "Assad Guard" was the 70th and 81st tank brigades under the command of Assad's brother, Col. Rifat Assad.

Syrian operation was nonetheless meticulously planned in line with the Soviet tactic of multi-echeloned attack.¹⁵ After initially punching into Israel, the first echelon would secure the crucial Rafid and Kuneitra gaps and allow the second echelon to continue the attack to the rest of the Golan. With major fighting over by the end of the first day, the second day would allow these same forces to sweep southward, eliminating any other resistance. The Golan would be mostly secure by the 30th hour of the fight.

¹² Asher, 61

¹³ Asher, 55

¹⁴ Asher, 63

¹⁵ Asher, 57

This would be accomplished by using infantry, tank, and artillery forces in concert. The infantry and armored forces would advance under the cover of heavily concentrated and massive artillery fire. The infantry brigades would then engage the front ranks of the enemy, allowing their organic tank battalions to pass through them and engage the enemy.

Northern Commands plans to combat invasion hinged upon two key assumptions. First: that there would be sufficient warning to mobilize sixty percent of the nation's army. Second: that the air force could successfully beat back any Arab advances made.¹⁶ The Israeli operational objective was to repulse the Syrians while maintaining her border at its current position as quickly as possible. This need for expediency was heightened by the fight simultaneously taking place in the Sinai. Viewed as the immediate threat to Israel, military needs clearly dictated an approach of "Syria first."¹⁷

The Israeli's were plagued by overconfidence in their capabilities. The defeats that had so humbled the Arabs had likewise strengthened the resolve of Israel's enemies.¹⁸ Israeli commanders meanwhile scoffed at the idea of having only two-days warning to mobilize for war, expecting five or six from the quality of their intelligence. The "totality of the tank" as espoused by the commander of Israeli armor and Assistant Chief of Staff Lieutenant General Tal had in effect overridden the doctrine of combined arms warfare. Much of what was invested in tanks and tank technology with funds siphoned from infantry weapons systems such as more advanced antitank munitions. It became the prevailing thought in the Israeli army that armor could stand alone in desert warfare where visibility was excellent and cover and concealment sparse. The air force

¹⁶ Rabinovich, 50

¹⁷ Rabinovich, 49

¹⁸ Rabinovich, 34

likewise became overconfident.¹⁹ Lt. General Elezar, the prime minister's Chief of Staff, downplayed the threat posed to the Israeli jets by Syrian antiaircraft capabilities stating that the air force could take care of them. Maj. General Zeira, Israeli Minister of Military Intelligence, went so far as to say, "There will not be another war for ten years," just eight days before the attacks.²⁰

Tactical Setting

The weather and terrain of the Golan in October of 1973 seriously hindered the attacking Syrians. The Syrians had initially wanted to attack at dawn with the sun directly at their backs and thus obscuring the Israelis' view. Because of the Egyptian dominance in when the attack would occur, the Syrians instead launched their attack in the afternoon.²¹ The sky was clear for the entirety of the battle with the exception of one light afternoon shower. The moon for the initial battle was at full illumination, necessary for the Egyptians crossing of the Suez, a consideration that mitigated the night-fighting advantage possessed by the Syrians.

The terrain itself does not make good tank country. To the south grasslands offer better going, while in the north large areas are rendered completely impassable by large basaltic boulders.²² The terrain of the Golan lends itself to anti-armor ambushes and is perilous for crews lacking infantry support. The volcanic cones that are scattered about the Golan provide both excellent observation and unhindered fields of fire. Many of these were integrated into the Israeli defense system as natural firing ramps. Three of

¹⁹ Rabinovich, 48

²⁰ Rabinovich, 52

²¹ Asher, 64

²² Rabinovich, 188

these cones dominate the landscape of the Golan. The Hermon, Mt. Avital, and Tel Faris comprised a vital part of the Israeli defensive line.²³

Mt. Hermon was the most important of these. Called “the eyes of Israel,” this electronic warfare outpost was of vital importance to the Israeli ability to observe Syrian movements, preparations, and to monitor Syrian radio and air traffic. Despite its importance, preparations and fortifications were incomplete. The upper fortifications were still under construction, no communication trenches had been dug around the primary fortification, and the site showed signs of general neglect.²⁴ Only thirteen infantrymen and an officer were garrisoned to defend the outpost which bolstered only one heavy machine gun, one assault rifle, and Uzis as individual firearms. .

The eastern boundary of the Golan faces the Damascus plain and ran along the “Purple Line” as the cease-fire line was called. The cease-fire line separating Israel from Syria was approximately 500m wide and monitored by U.N. observers.²⁵

Just on the Israeli side of the line was the antitank ditch, the first major obstacle the Syrians would encounter in any advance and crucial to buying time for the Israelis. The sixty-ninety minutes required to approach and cross the antitank ditch was of paramount concern to the Syrians and Israel’s biggest defense.²⁶ This was the only thing physically separating the two opposing armies. Behind this ditch were constructed eleven fortified observation posts garrisoned by twenty men supported by a tank platoon each.²⁷ These were sturdy positions that placed forward observers and intelligence personnel very forward on the field. Behind these on the eastern face of the low ridge

²³ Rabinovich, 286; Herzog, 74

²⁴ Herzog, 69

²⁵ Rabinovich, 64

²⁶ Asher, 55

²⁷ Herzog, 62

overlooking the shallow valley were tank ramps prepared to allow the Israeli tanks to optimize their role as defensive weapons.

The ramps were set up as three-tiered ramparts. These provided free and often interlocking fields of fire. The lowest of these allowed the tank to fire while completely hidden out of sight of Syrian forward observers. The second tier allowed the tanks to sit hull-down while firing. The highest set of prepared positions offered less protection but allowed the tanks to depress their guns sufficiently to engage targets at close range. The fronts of all these ramps were sufficiently steep to deny any attempts by Syrians to mount frontal attacks.²⁸ The canalizing terrain was another key to the defense of the heights. Paired with extensive mining, this would allow a relatively small number of Israeli artillery pieces to fire into “killing zones.”²⁹ A crucial flaw of the defenses was the lack of options provided to the defenders. There was but one defensive line on the Golan. The next defensible position was the bank of the River Jordan. While this lack of strategic depth should rightly be viewed as a weakness, it would ultimately help save the Israelis.

There are several primary roads crisscrossing the heights. Two roads run from north to south with the other five running east to west. These north-south roads are the Rafid-Masada road and the Trans-Arabian Pipeline (TAP) road running from Jordan, across the Golan, and into Lebanon. The five east-west roads run from bridges across the Jordan and terminate at the Rafid-Masada road.³⁰ These roads are vital to speedy movement across the broken terrain of the heights.³¹

²⁸ Asher, 87

²⁹ Asher, 101

³⁰ Herzog, 70

³¹ Kahalani, Avigdor. The Heights of Courage. Westport: Greenwood, 1984. p. 37

While the North leant itself more naturally to the defense, the Rafid gap in the south gap was not as suitable for a deep thrust into Israel. The best east-west road runs through El-Al only to terminate at the steepest of the descents into the Jordan River valley. Every step westward would dissipate mass and divide the attackers further. A major possibility at the Rafid gap was the opportunity to seize both the TAP and Rafid-Masada roads, outflanking the entire force south of Kuneitra.³²

Normally, there were two infantry battalions stationed on the Golan manning the fixed positions. Behind these were the tanks of the Barak Brigade; the 74th and 53rd Battalions in the north and south, respectively. These were seen by the Syrians as the troops to beat. The basic Israeli element was the tank platoon, consisting of three tanks. Combinations of up to ten tanks were expected to hold key positions. Behind the tanks were the four batteries of self-propelled artillery. The day before the invasion the Israelis' were at their highest stage of alert—"Alert Gimmel."³³ The under-strength 7th Armored Brigade moved to the Golan immediately with word of the alert. The 7th Brigade consisted of the 75th, 77th, 82nd, and Armor School Battalions. In reaction to the Syrian concentration of forces in the sector north of Kuneitra, the 7th Brigade was deployed to this sector leaving the Barak Brigade to defend the area to the south of Kuneitra. In addition, all reservists were prepared to mobilize with all reserve mobilization staffs confined to their camps. The result was a Northern Command with 80% of its wartime allotment of tanks. All told, the Israelis possessed 177 tanks and 44 artillery pieces in the Golan at the outbreak of hostilities.³⁴ The Syrians planned to use their entire military in the attack on Israel. The first echelon of the attack would be

³² Asher, 56

³³ Asher, 37

³⁴ Herzog, 61

composed of the 7th, 9th, and 5th Infantry Divisions.³⁵ While these were infantry divisions, it is important to note that each of these was comprised of two infantry brigades, a mechanized infantry brigade. Each of these brigades was assigned an armor battalion. The 7th held the northern sector from Kuneitra northwards, the 9th held the central sector from Tel Hara to Kuneitra, and the 5th held the line from Rafid to Yarmouk. The three battalions in the line totaled 540 tanks; the 1st and 3rd Armored Divisions behind them held 460, and the Republican Guard along with two tank brigades and 200 fixed tanks in the line brought the count to 1500.³⁶ The basic fighting unit of the Syrian army was the tank company. Comprised of ten tanks, this unit was expected to be able to fire thirty to forty rounds per minute.³⁷ With the ratio of Syrian to Israeli tanks, each Israeli tank could destroy three Syrian tanks before being itself destroyed and the Syrian tanks would still control the field. Also of special importance was the assignment of antiaircraft assets at the company level. This meticulous attention to antiaircraft cover was the Syrian's chief method of neutralizing the Israeli air force. Engineers were attached at the brigade level, and these engineer units played a crucial role in dealing with the extensive Israeli obstacles including the antitank ditch and minefields.

The armies were fairly evenly matched technologically. The Israelis fielded British Centurion tanks in their first line units, with many of them being converted from gasoline to diesel engines. Israeli reserve units used "Super-Shermans" in their second line units, Shermans which had their turrets replaced with improved French ones and had their main guns replaced with British-made 105mm cannons. These tanks carried a main gun that countered the Russian made T-54, T-55, and T-62 tanks. The Israeli main guns

³⁵ Herzog, 53

³⁶ Herzog, 63

³⁷ Asher, 57

actually outranged those of the Syrians; and with the added range supplied by their elevated positions served their Israeli gunners well.³⁸ The T-62 fared little better than its predecessors.³⁹ The Syrians did possess one distinct advantage over the Israeli tanks. Most of the Syrian tanks were equipped with infrared lights and scopes. These gave the Syrians a tremendous advantage over the Israelis in night-fighting.⁴⁰ This was traditionally an Israeli strength, but with this technology Syria owned night operations. When stationary and in a good fighting position, the full moon allowed the Israelis to see movements on the valley floor before them. During night movements and in the fog of battle, the advantage returned to the Syrians.

The Israelis enjoyed an advantage in the quality of their pilots, though this was in large part nullified by the wide use of the radar-equipped ZSU-3-4 anti-aircraft system. Its quadruple 23mm cannons paired with the rest of the Soviet-built and maintained anti-aircraft wrought havoc on the Israeli air force.⁴¹ The primary APCs of the two sides were evenly matched and antiquated. The BTR-152 was the first Soviet-made APC and was similar in its capabilities to the Israeli half-tracks. These were the primary APCs of the respective sides. The Syrians additionally fielded a number of BMP-1 carriers armed with 73mm smoothbore guns, though these proved to be ineffective and were widely destroyed.⁴²

Syrian tanks and armored vehicles were widely outfitted with anti-tank missiles. The most important of these was the Sagger anti-tank missile assigned at the brigade

³⁸ Asher, 87

³⁹ Kahalani, 98

⁴⁰ Rabinovich, 136

⁴¹ Asher, 155; Rabinovich, 30

⁴² Asher, 88

level.⁴³ The uneven terrain of the Golan made this weapon far less effective. The Syrian infantry widely employed RPGs against Israeli armor and infantry vehicles. While these failed to penetrate many of the tanks, they had a devastating effect on soft-skinned vehicles and APCs. They also killed many Israeli tank commanders as they stood out of their turrets.⁴⁴

The Israeli Army Transport Corps was utterly strapped by the call ups. Battalions were moved by chartered civilian buses while tank carriers were not widely enough available. Tanks waited in their rear depots for trucks to take them forward towards the battle.⁴⁵ The Israeli's did enjoy the advantage of good roads and tank tracks rear of the defensive line on the Golan. The Israelis had just finished in January widespread improvements to the seven major roads as well as the tank tracks linking vital positions.⁴⁶ The Syrians initially enjoyed an abundance of logistical support. Reports came in the two days preceding the battle of supply convoys teaming on the Syrian first line of defense.⁴⁷ The Syrians were not able, once the battle commenced, to maintain these supply lines. Here the advantage fell oddly enough to the Israelis due to their utter lack of strategic depth. Supply vehicle had almost no distance to travel between supply depots and the forward supply points. The Syrians meanwhile outran their supply lines.⁴⁸ Further exacerbating this inequity was the quality of Israeli CS and CSS crews.⁴⁹ Repair crews were able to get knocked-out tanks back into battle three, four, and even five times. While this certainly would have been impossible with more strategic depth, this ability to

⁴³ Herzog, 60

⁴⁴ Rabinovich, 35

⁴⁵ Asher, 67

⁴⁶ Asher, 56

⁴⁷ Herzog, 68

⁴⁸ Asher, 159

⁴⁹ Asher, 183

resurrect tanks resulted in more pressure on the enemy than would have otherwise been possible.

Command, control, and communications were extremely centralized in the Syrian army. The planning was both meticulous and rigid. The control and communications can best be exemplified by examining the OPSEC displayed immediately preceding the attack. The battalion commanders were briefed on when the invasion would begin. Company commanders received this information two hours before beginning movement. And platoon leaders were told one hour before stepping off. Orders were even issued to remove all radios from the troops to maintain radio silence.⁵⁰ Control and communications were extremely tight and likewise centralized. When the 9th Infantry Division had success and the 5th and 7th did not, the successful had to halt its advance to allow neighboring units to catch up. In this way, a lack of decentralized control precluded exploitation of opportunities while allowing the Israelis time to mount an adequate defense.⁵¹

Israeli command and control were far less centralized. Command was effectively delegated from the Regional Commander all the way down to the platoon level. Platoon leaders were assigned missions vital to the defense of the entire Golan. Meanwhile, control was less solid. Control was effective down to the battalion commander. When the battalion control broke down, battalions scattered to the wind. This was largely a result of communication that was decentralized down to the same level.⁵² Brigade nets could only be accessed through the battalion commander's and executive officer's command vehicles. If both of these were knocked out, battalions were left to their own

⁵⁰ Herzog, 75

⁵¹ Asher, 154

⁵² Kahalani, 99

devices.⁵³ When key leaders were taken out of the fight below the battalion level their troops needed to be quickly shepherded into new chains of command to avoid gravitating to rear staging areas.

Israeli staffs at all levels were flexible. Brigade operations and intelligence officers fired antitank weapons, commanded task forces, and directed reinforcements when the battle became desperate. One brigade operations officer stemmed the tide of a retreat when he saw operational tanks and artillery in a road bound column.⁵⁴ Without flexibility the Israelis would have been quickly routed.⁵⁵ The Syrians displayed the same adherence to Soviet doctrine with their rigid and inflexible control. Control was concrete, but the leaders were inflexible and continued their missions in accordance with the stated plans rather than the intent of the commanders.

The Israelis utterly failed in regard to intelligence. While the troop buildups could be clearly seen from the Hermon, no actions were taken until the day prior to the outbreak of hostilities. The buildup of troops was alarming, almost doubling overnight on the morning of the 5th. The Israelis saw the entirety of the Syrian army on war footing. The second Syrian defensive line was empty.⁵⁶ There was intelligence that the Soviet missions in Damascus and Cairo had evacuated all the families of the advisors in Syria and Egypt. A source in Damascus said Assad would go to war on the 6th. The Israeli Intelligence Minister was asleep at the wheel. So worried was Zeira about initiating an unnecessary mobilization, he erred on the side of disaster.⁵⁷

⁵³ Asher, 168

⁵⁴ Asher, 183

⁵⁵ Asher, 134

⁵⁶ Herzog, 61

⁵⁷ Asher, 70

The Syrians meanwhile had done their homework. During the battle-days, the Syrians had taken careful note of Israeli response times and tactics. The Syrians also had gathered intelligence on the construction of the fixed positions from a Syrian Druse who had worked in their construction.⁵⁸ The Syrians witnessed numerous mobilizations and expected their 60 tank companies to meet 20 Israeli tank companies. Included in that estimate were a generous number of reserves called up. The Syrians maintained strict OPSEC in the days before the war. All troop movements were done at night without lights and a minimum of noise. High-ranking officers removed their rank at the front while troops stayed hidden and dug in during the day.⁵⁹

The Israelis held an undeniable advantage in training. Almost all of the senior commanders were combat veterans. Most of the troop leaders had experienced combat. Many troops had not seen combat, though the training they had undergone had made them superior tankers. Crew drills and gunnery were focuses of the training, and it showed. Israeli gunnery outclassed Syrian gunnery all across the battle field. One Israeli tank platoon could knock out 25 Syrian tanks in a matter of minutes with no casualties.⁶⁰ Israeli crews engaged targets from their tank ramps at ranges of up to 4,000m. These tankers laid down accurate fire on the enemy long before they were able to get to or bridge the antitank ditch.

For their part, the Syrians were also well trained. While they did not possess the gunnery skills of the Israelis, they had trained often and intensely on terrain like that of the Golan.⁶¹ They had performed time and time again the procedure for bridging the

⁵⁸ Asher, 146

⁵⁹ Herzog, 78

⁶⁰ Asher, 194

⁶¹ Rabinovich, 58

antitank ditch. They fought in line with Soviet doctrine using multi-echelon attacks and an “inferno of artillery.”⁶² The Syrians did not shy away from the fire when it came upon them. Instead they continued to move in the face of it. Fewer of the Syrians were veterans, though many of the senior officers and NCOs were.

Morale of the Syrians was excellent prior to and at the outbreak of hostilities. These were motivated, well trained soldiers that possessed an anti-Zionist fervor that surpassed all others in the Arab world.⁶³ As the fighting began, Syrian morale remained high, bolstered by the initial momentum of the attack along with initial successes against the Israeli defenders. The troops were finally on the assault after literally years of training for this very moment. This momentum was best illustrated by how the Syrians reacted to hits scored on vehicles in their formations. Though many vehicles were being hit, the assault drove on. The morale of the Israeli troops was markedly different. The call up to alert “Gimmel,” Israel’s highest level of military alert, had fallen on Yom Kippur. Not only that, but it was also the Sabbath. This was an unusual and unwelcome event. Yom Kippur, the Jewish new year, is a day Israel totally shuts down. Television and radio stations shut down. Everyone fasts while no one drives or does any other work. There had been false alarms before, and many of the reservists called up felt this was merely the latest unnecessary hardship visited upon them.⁶⁴ When the fighting did commence, Israeli morale was high. The defenders were ready to beat back any advances. Their spirits were bolstered in the opening blows of the battle as tanks scored far reaching hits. The Israeli’s were similarly emboldened by charismatic leadership.

⁶² Herzog, 79

⁶³ Herzog, 81

⁶⁴ Herzog, 50

Tank commanders stood out of their hatches as they orchestrated the defense.⁶⁵

Charismatic leadership embodied by LTC Avigdor Kahalani resulted in high performance and rigid discipline in the face of overwhelming odds. On both side, troops were fresh and largely unaffected by the weather.

The Syrian leadership suffered from several key weaknesses. Syria's War Minister during the Yom Kippur War was Major General Mustafa Tlas.⁶⁶ He was a very politically minded general and placed his headquarters halfway between the Syrian lines and Damascus. This placed him in a perilous position. As he sat in his headquarters, he recalled commanders at pivotal times in the battle in an attempt to assess situations. He neither possessed an accurate view of the battlefield nor allowed his subordinate commanders the autonomy they required to be truly effective. Perhaps the most significant Syrian leader was Brigadier General Omar Abrash.⁶⁷ Commanding the 7th Infantry Division, he was a talented graduate of the U.S. Command and General Staff College. He led his division from the front and personally led the attack towards Kuneitra against the Israeli 77th Battalion of the 7th Armored Brigade. On the evening of October seventh and on very verge of victory, his tank was hit and he was killed. The attack stalled and was postponed allowing the 77th vital time to rest and reinforce its positions. When a fresh attack was launched again by the Syrians the following morning it was contained, eventually causing the entire Syrian offensive to falter and, ultimately, collapse.

The Chief of Staff of the Israeli Defense Forces was quite different from his Syrian counterpart. Lieutenant General David Elazar was combat tested and a proven

⁶⁵ Kahalani, 42

⁶⁶ Asher, 61

⁶⁷ Asher, 140

leader.⁶⁸ He distinguished himself in the 1948 War of Independence, commanded an infantry brigade in the 1956 Sinai campaign, and then served as the Israeli Armored Corps Commander from 1957-1961. Over the course of his career, he did much to foster the preeminence of the tank in the Israeli Army. As a Major General in 1962, he was commander of Northern Command and was responsible for the brilliant campaign to capture the Golan Heights in the Six Day War. While the cabinet authorized partial mobilization of reserves hours before the war began, it was Elazar that authorized their complete mobilization. Major General Yitzhak Hofi was the commander of Northern Command in 1972 and 1973. It was his preparations in the months before the war that would allow Israel to be successful. These included the construction of extensive tank tracks that included ammunition caches of 200 tank shells each set at given intervals. He also moved armored mobilization centers well forward of their previous positions. In preparing the defenses themselves, Hofi extended and deepened the anti-tank ditch and laid more extensive minefields to further slow Syrian attackers in killing zones.⁶⁹ All told, these measures cut Israeli deployment times in half while lengthening the approach time required of any attacker. Most all of the Israeli commanders on the Golan were battle-tested veterans, many with experience fighting on the Heights in 1967. They were charismatic and flexible leaders, traits which helped Israel beat back such an assault.

The Action

The objective of the Syrians was simple- retake the Golan Heights and advance to the River Jordan in thirty-six hours.⁷⁰ In order to do this, the Syrians would mount an onslaught of three infantry and two armored divisions. Following Soviet doctrine, Syrian

⁶⁸ Herzog, 49

⁶⁹ Herzog, 62

⁷⁰ Asher, 63

artillery units were given extensive fire missions to help prep the Israeli defenses. The Syrian 9th Infantry Division was to drive west, south of Kuneitra, and cut the Israeli's lines of communication. Simultaneously, the 7th Infantry Division was to conduct holding actions along its entire front centered on Wasset. As this was underway, the 5th Infantry Division was to breach Israeli defenses to the southwest of Rafid. Once the initial breakthroughs were complete, the 7th Infantry Division would drive south as the 9th drove north, meeting and resulting in a double envelopment of the bulk of the Israeli forces.⁷¹ A critical mission to the success of the attack would be the commando attack on Israel's electronic warfare outpost atop Mt. Hermon by the 82nd Parachute Battalion. The plan was based on the assumption complete mobilization of Israeli reserves would require almost three days.

The Israeli's for their part had a less defined plan for the defense. Israeli defensive plans were all predicated on the assumption any attack from Syria would be predicted at least seventy-two hours. The plan was for units on the Golan to hold the prepared positions and buy time for reserves to mobilize and enter the fight.⁷² There was precious little flexibility regarding options for the Israelis. Because of an almost complete lack of strategic depth, there was no option of trading ground for time. In fact, the next defensible position for the Israelis was the western bank of the River Jordan. The option of a preemptive strike by the Israelis was perhaps their best option, though this was taken off the table by the cabinet and prime minister because of the political implications of doing so.

⁷¹ Herzog, 33

⁷² Rabinovich, 85

Initially, the Syrians were bunched along their first defensive line. The 7th Infantry Division was at the northern end of the line, the 9th Infantry Division in the center, and the 5th Infantry to the South.⁷³ The 1st and 3rd Armored Divisions sat well to the rear in Kiswe and Katana, respectively, serving as reserves while safeguarding the regime in Damascus. On the Israeli side of the line, meanwhile, the Barak Brigade held the entire length of the defensive line situated in prepared fighting positions. The focus of the defensive setup was oriented on the bunker system that overlooked the Purple Line. Meanwhile, the 7th Brigade sat three miles to the rear situated on the Nafekh-Masada road. The reserves were in the midst of a total call up when the opening shots of the war were fired.

At two in the afternoon on the 6th of October, the Syrian artillery barrage began. Simultaneously, the 5th, 7th, and 9th Infantry Divisions began their approach toward the antitank ditch. Spearheaded by mine-clearing vehicles and armored fighting vehicles, these columns advanced slowly toward the Israeli lines. The 5th rumbled forward in good order, though its armor soon bunched together in an unwieldy mass.⁷⁴ The 7th and 9th divisions advanced toward the north and south of Kuneitra and fell into confusion immediately. Bridging tanks in these divisions were traveling in the rear of the columns while road discipline disintegrated under the intense pressure to get to grips with the Israelis. The Israelis meanwhile were ready and waiting. Extremely well trained in long-range gunnery and firing from atop their prepared ramps, they concentrated their fire on the gaps created in the minefields and on Syrian engineer assets such as mine-clearing and bridge-laying tanks. One by one these were picked off at ranges up to 4,000

⁷³ Herzog, 49

⁷⁴ Herzog, 69

meters.⁷⁵ This mastery of gunnery bought the precious time required for the reserves to rush forward to their fighting positions. Despite this feat, the initiative lay solidly with the advancing Syrians as the momentum and sheer mass of their attack applied crushing weight to the thin Israeli lines.

Very soon after the assault began, the Syrian 82nd Parachute Battalion launched its assault on the electronic warfare outpost atop the Hermon. The five-hundred man force first launched a frontal assault resulting in fifty Syrian casualties. The attackers then resorted to sniping at the forty Israeli defenders. As the Israelis fell back to their final protective line inside high walls, the Syrian commandos scaled the walls using grappling hooks and proceeded to crush the Israeli defenders. The Israelis fled and were almost all killed or captured.⁷⁶ Once this occurred, the Israelis were very near blind. This loss of intelligence capabilities very nearly cost Israel the war. Meanwhile, down below, the Israelis dealt as well as possible with the echelon after echelon moving toward them. Units engaged the attackers at odds as unfavorable as fifteen to one.⁷⁷ The 77th Battalion of the 7th Armored Brigade held the entire gap between the Hermon and Booster Ridge. With only twenty seven tanks at his disposal, the battalion held for thirty-six hours the line, against literally hundreds of Syrian tanks. During the process they fought off repeated attacks from the 7th Infantry Division.

To the south, the Barak Brigade took a heavy beating. RPG-7s and Sagger missiles knocked out one tank after another. By the evening, only fifteen of the brigade's tanks were still operational and faced an enemy 450 tanks strong.⁷⁸ These surviving

⁷⁵ Asher, 83

⁷⁶ Herzog, 89

⁷⁷ Kahalani, 49

⁷⁸ Asher, 120

tanks fought valiantly as the Syrian 5th Infantry Division assaulted north along the TAP Road. The Syrians were aided greatly in their attacks by the night vision capabilities they possessed. As they advanced, they marked passages through mine fields with colored blinkers while the Israelis sat nearly blind. While many of the Israeli tank commanders had night vision goggles, their tanks lacked the equipment necessary to engage the enemy at long range. Crippled further by a lack of flares in the artillery, ranges were reduced to as little as one hundred meters.⁷⁹

As all this occurred, the Barak Brigade commander, commander in fact of all the scattered forces in the south of the Golan, Brigadier General Ben Shoham, his deputy commander and operations officer were all killed. Ben Shoham was at the time of his death seeing to the disposition and reinforcement of forces and this break in the chain of command offered the Syrians more time to capitalize and solidify their gains. The Syrians continued to close on the Israeli division headquarters at the Nafekh crossroads. As the tanks approached, the situation became so desperate senior staff officers were reduced to firing bazooka rounds and machine guns at the Syrian tanks. As the tanks arrived, however, the Israeli 679th Reserve Armored Brigade arrived and engaged the Syrian tanks.⁸⁰ This was a truly crucial moment in the battle, as other Syrian tanks pressed home the attack, it was piecemeal forces that cut them to ribbons. Brigadier General Laner was largely responsible for this being done effectively. Called out of retirement by Eitan, he was instructed to form a division to command. Instead of doing this in the rear, he actually stood at the bridge over which reinforcements had to stream directing his makeshift division into battle.

⁷⁹ Asher, 153

⁸⁰ Herzog, 154

This was the improvisation that was going on all over the Golan. It might well have been a different story entirely were it not for the Syrian decision to pause the offensive at five in the evening on October 7th. The Syrian commanders doomed the advance. By halting the advance with an hour of daylight left, they allowed the Israelis time to reorganize and get two divisions into the fight.⁸¹ While not all units obeyed this directive, the 1st Armored Division and attached elements of the 5th Infantry Division did. With the roads wide open in front of them, they halted to reorganize. This failure to exploit the initiative was compounded by the Major General Tlas's decision to commit the 3rd Armored Division in the north where the Israeli defenses were holding and continued to hold. The 8th of October saw primarily efforts by the Israelis to stabilize the line. As the Syrians launched several abortive attempts to attack, they were beaten back time and time again by Israeli tank gunners at long range.⁸² The 9th saw the beginning of the Israeli counterattack. The 146th Reserve Armored Division led by Major General Peled struck into the Syrian 1st Armored division and drove them back across the Purple Line. Meanwhile, Laner's makeshift forces pushed the Syrian 3rd Armored Division and elements of the 9th Infantry Division back across the Purple Line. In the north, Brigadier General Eitan reconstituted the Barak Brigade and prepared his forces for the Israeli counterattack.⁸³

At eleven in the morning on the 11th of October the Israelis launched their counterattack. Driving hard and fast into units that had taken heavy casualties over the previous week, divisions led by Eitan and Laner drove deep into Syria. As units to the south bumbled into lava fields and took heavy casualties from determined infantry with

⁸¹ Asher, 172

⁸² Rabinovich, 212

⁸³ Kahalani, 122

Sagger missiles and RPGs, the Israelis quickly decided to bypass those areas. As Laner drove deeper into Syria, he saw a large column advancing towards his position. After assessing the situation, he realized it must be an enemy column. Moving the four brigades under his command into an open box formation, the enemy which was in fact the Iraqi 3rd Armored Division drove in unprepared for a fight. In just minutes an entire Iraqi brigade was destroyed. This was the last serious attack against the Israelis.⁸⁴ By the evening 13th, Israeli howitzers were shelling the military airfield just outside of Damascus. While the Iraqi division had been soundly and quickly defeated, their demise resulted in the halting of the Israeli column. In the short time the Iraqis occupied a major portion of the Syrian line the Syrians were able to move the Syrian 3rd Armored Division north to protect Damascus. Sporadic, uncoordinated assaults were mounted by the Syrians until the 17th when a lull descended on the lines. In light of this and the continued war in the Sinai, the offensive was halted and units pulled from the line to be moved to Southern Command's control.

The Israelis still had one objective to seize. The observation post atop the Hermon had been captured on the first day of the war and it was of vital importance to the Israelis that it be retaken before the inevitable cease fire. On the 21st of October, IAF Chinooks delivered paratroopers and infantrymen of the Golani 31st Parachute Brigade to the top of the mountain. Supported by fearsome air and artillery support, the Israelis drove out the Syrian troops early on the 22nd. A cease fire followed only hours later.

The Israelis had won the battle. The battle lines at the end of the war were well inside Syria. Israeli heavy artillery was within range of Damascus. The Syrian army was a shattered remnant of its pre-war self. The Syrians had nearly achieved their objectives,

⁸⁴ Asher, 239

though they had come away with nothing. Ultimately, it was a victory purchased at a tremendous cost. The Israelis won militarily but lost politically. While the Israelis had gained territory, it was returned to the Syrians under the terms of the cease fire. The Israelis lost 774 men on the Golan. During the war, they spent an amount equivalent to one year's GDP. Israeli public opinion factionalized and has never come back together. The Labor party, which had ruled for thirty years, lost all influence in the following elections. There was also the shattering of the appearance of the invincibility of the IDF and an increased reliance upon the United States for assistance. The Syrians meanwhile viewed the battle as a vindication of the Arab soldier.

Lessons Learned

Objective-

The Syrians had very reasonable and well defined objectives. They sought to capture the Hermon and retake the Golan Heights in thirty-six hours. This was well within their reach and was almost accomplished. Failure can be attributed to a failure to maintain focus on the larger objective. This was demonstrated with Tlas's decision not to reinforce his successful divisions in the south and press home the attack. The Israelis for their part also had a very well defined objective. The forces on the Golan sought to beat back the Syrian invaders and protect the nation's survival. Once this objective was accomplished, the need for forces elsewhere shifted Northern Commands objective to holding ground taken and recapturing the Hermon before the cease-fire.

Offensive-

The Syrians initially held a monopoly on the offensive. In the attack from the very beginning of the war, the Israelis fought a purely defensive battle while enjoying

almost no strategic depth. The Israelis fought with their backs utterly against the wall. Because the Syrians eased up on the offensive after a successful breakthrough in the south, they allowed the Israelis to seize the initiative and go on the offensive. Syrian commanders also misused the idea of offensive operations. The Syrians never withdrew, even when they should have. Because of heavy pressure to keep on the attack, Syrian commanders often attempted to fight through that which they could have more cheaply defeated through maneuver. Once on the offensive, the Israelis did not stop until they were within artillery range of Damascus. This was the limit of their advance because of the other demands of the overall war.

Mass-

The Israelis fought their defensive battle unable to effectively mass their forces. Because of this, the effectiveness of their armored forces was greatly limited. This was done out of pure necessity. Because of their lack of strategic depth, there was no ability to trade ground for time. Once the Golan was lost, there were precious few options open to the Israelis. The Israelis were thus forced to trade effective tactics and tanks for time to sufficiently mount their forces to construct an adequate defense. Because of superior gunnery, the Israelis were able to accomplish much more with less. This resulted in less units being required for effective mass to be achieved. Paired with the agility shown by Israeli commanders as illustrated by Brigadier General Laner's "traffic direction" the numerically inferior Israelis were able to get key units to the right place at the right time. The Syrian forces had a potentially huge advantage regarding mass. Their numbers alone gave them a noteworthy advantage. Forces were committed early on very effectively in large numbers and where they were needed. A key opportunity was missed when the

Syrians failed to mass enough forces in the south to exploit the gap created by the 1st Armored and 5th Infantry Divisions. Were these units reinforced, they could easily have driven hard into the soft underbelly of the Golan and outflanked the entire defenses of the Golan.

Economy of Force-

The Syrians should have better used their commandos and paratroopers. While they did allocate the minimum force necessary for the assault on the electronic warfare post on the Hermon, they should have retained the plan for air assault operations against the bridges over which Israeli reinforcements were to come. The Syrians did an excellent job remaining focused on the objective, though it is arguable that the 3rd Armored Division should have been used to reinforce the 1st Armored and 5th Infantry in the south rather than the 7th and 9th Infantry Divisions in the north to better focus energy and forces on the objective. The Israelis exhibited good economy of force. Making a lot out of nothing was the theme of the Israelis during the battle. Israeli platoons held up entire Syrian brigades, individual tanks were sent to different places when needed. When an initial assault failed on the Hermon, it was bypassed until the larger objective was accomplished. This is how the Israelis fought the entire war.

Maneuver

Israeli maneuver was superb. Because of the tank tracks prepared in the months before the war, the Israelis maximized the effectiveness of their tanks and artillery pieces. When needed, guns and tracks moved quickly from one prepared position to another without the worry of thrown tracks and stuck vehicles. Meanwhile, the Syrians were made to bumble through the counter mobility measures constructed by the defenders.

Minefields and the antitank ditch severely hampered Syrian mobility. Because of a narrow minded approach to the offensive, Syrian commanders failed to effectively maneuver against Israeli forces, often at a horrendous price. The Syrians did, however, own the night. While the Israelis lost tank after tank to the terrain when moving at night, the Syrians moved effectively through the rough and rocky terrain aided by their night-vision capabilities.

Unity of Command-

The Syrians had excellent centralization of command at the expense of individual unit agility and versatility. While their unity of command was strong, it was cumbersome to completion of the overall mission. Strict adherence to the original battle plan resulted in missed opportunities as commanders had to wait for instructions to alter their missions. Division commanders and below were indeed given individual missions crucial to the completion of the objective, though there was little change in orders as circumstances changed on the ground. This is well illustrated inaction upon a breakthrough in the south with a stalemate in the north. The Israelis initially had terrible unity of command. There were both commanders without units and units without established commanders. As platoons were hurled in front of the advancing Syrians, it took significant time to establish AORs and assign commanders to specific missions with specific troops, especially at the division level. At the brigade level and below, this was less the case with perhaps the best unity of command seen when observing the actions of individual platoon leaders. As the battle progressed, unity of command grew stronger and stronger for the Israelis. Unlike their foes, the Israelis retained their autonomy and decentralized command as they went on the offensive. This is very apparent in actions such as those of

Brigadier General Laner and his opportunistic trap sprung on the Iraqi 3rd Armored Division.

Simplicity-

The Syrians possessed a simple plan and a largely effective one at that. Less effective were the orders given to the commanders in the fight. Told not to withdraw or retreat, the commanders limited the mobility of the units they commanded. Things were chaotic for the Israelis, though the orders given were clear and concise. The defensive plan was simple. Because of its predication on knowing the attack was imminent, however, the implementation of the plan was anything but simple once the battle began.

Surprise-

Initial surprise rests solely with the Syrians. Though the Israelis should almost certainly have been more prepared for the attack than they were, the Syrians achieved nearly complete surprise. The Israeli surprise lay in how quickly the army was able to mobilize. Largely due to the individual actions of Lieutenant General Elazar, the reserves mobilized much more quickly than the Syrians counted on. This had a major impact on the outcome of the battle.

Security-

The Syrians had excellent security. While in complete view of the Israeli defenders, their OPSEC was so effective the element of surprise was protected completely. The Syrians did sacrifice one additional advantage they could have used by agreeing to the Egyptian request of launching a midday attack. Had they stuck to their initial plan of a dawn attack, they would have attacked with the sun at their backs lessening the effectiveness of the Israeli gunners. A major Syrian success was the

assignment of anti-aircraft assets at the company level. This resulted in an almost total neutralization of the Israeli Air Force. The Syrians did misstep when they assaulted beyond their SAM net as these units were picked apart by the IAF. Another key advantage of the Syrians was their night vision capabilities. This allowed them to engage the Israelis far more effectively at night than the Israelis could engage them. The Israelis exhibited mixed levels of success with regard to their security. Their counter mobility measures were brutally effective. Israeli OPSEC left something to be desired. The Syrians possessed the layouts of the Israeli defensive positions and knew the response times of Israeli units through observation of "battle days." Israeli intelligence failed miserably in assessing the Syrian intentions. Imminent attack should have been evident from informants as well as the absence of the usual second line of Syrian defenses. The Israelis also failed to provide effective infantry support for their armor elements. This had disastrous effects in the lava flows of the Golan and limited their ability to fight effectively in built up areas.

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[The Battle For the Golan Heights in the Yom Kippur War]

CDT Benjamin Scott
Information Brief
28 April 2006

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[Agenda]

- Introduction
- Strategic Setting
- Operational Setting
- Tactical Setting
- Major Phases of Battle
- Military Lessons Learned
- Conclusion

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Introduction

- Senior Honors Project
 - Honors level undergraduate work in field
 - Accompanies my battle-analysis
- Why the battle for the Golan?
- Mission- Give a detailed brief of the Battle for the Golan Heights IAW the Battle Analysis Method using the Principles of War and Tenets of AirLand Operations (FM 3-0)

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Strategic Setting

- What caused the war?
 - Egypt preeminent in Arab world
 - Hafez al Assad's Syrian Agenda
- Opponents- Israel vs. Syria and Egypt
- War Aims-
 - Israel- maintain borders
 - Syria- take back the Golan Heights
 - Egypt- take the Sinai

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[Strategic Setting]

- Armed forces possessed-
 - Israeli Army, IAF
 - Combat tested
 - Premier forces in region
 - Small
 - Syrian and Egyptian Armies
 - Major improvements since '67 defeat
 - Level of education and professionalism
 - Religious fanaticism

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[Operational Setting]

- Objectives
 - Syria- take the Golan Heights in 36hrs.
 - Israel- repulse Syrian invaders to free up troops to fight in the Sinai
- Effects of Egyptian/Syrian alliance
 - Differences in *Al-Owda* and *Badhr*
- Tactics and Doctrine
 - Israeli preeminence of the tank and IAF
 - Syrian use of Soviet doctrine and tactics

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[Operational Setting]

- Personalities
 - Syrian War Minister MG Tlas
 - Israeli Chief of Staff LTG Elezar
 - Overconfidence in IAF
 - Overconfidence in intel

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[Tactical Setting]

- Weather
- Terrain
 - North- canalizing, rocky, decreased effectiveness of AT missiles
 - South- flat, better tank country
 - Antitank ditch

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[Tactical Setting- Opposing Forces]

- 2 Israeli Brigades, 5 Syrian Divisions
- 177 Israeli tanks, 1500 Syrian tanks
- Israelis- Centurions, Super-Shermans
- Syrians- T-54, T-55, T-62
- Largely equal in capabilities
 - Israelis had range
 - Syrians had numbers, night vision

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[Tactical Setting]

- Logistical systems
 - Israelis- new tank tracks, shallow depth
 - Syrians- all distance won must be covered
- Command, Control, and Communications
 - Organization
 - Centralization

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[Tactical Setting]

- Intelligence
 - Israel- Hermon, agents
 - Syria- Arab construction crews, "Battle Days"
- Doctrine, Training, and Experience
 - Israeli gunnery and experience
 - Realistic Syrian training on like-terrain

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[Tactical Setting]

- Morale
- Leadership
 - Superb Israeli leaders, combat tested
 - Competent Syrian leaders, limited by command structure

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[The Action]

- Mission
 - Syria- retake the Golan in 36 hrs.
 - Why?
 - Objectives to that end
 - Israel- quickly repulse the invasion and stabilize border
 - Vital to national survival
- Options

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[The Action]

- Disposition of Forces
 - Israeli fixed positions
 - Syrian divisions, Israeli brigades
- Opening Moves
 - Elezar's call-up
 - 1400 attack
 - Huge Syrian advantage

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[Major Phases]

- Assault
 - Syrian 5th, 7th, 9th Infantry Div
 - Israeli 7th Bde and Barak Bde.
- Syrian Breakthrough
 - 1st Armored, 5th Infantry
 - Use of 3rd Armored
- Containment
- Counterattack

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[Outcome]

- Israel took back Golan, Hermon
- Israel Gained territory
- Israel lost 774 men, Syria 3,400
- Israel paid huge price for victory
 - 1 Yr. GDP
 - Increased dependence on U.S.
- Syrians saw as redemption of Arab soldier, territory returned

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[Lessons Learned]

- Offensive
 - Syrians began with offensive, lost it
 - Israel seized when opportunity appeared
- Objective
 - Syrians stayed fairly true- exception
3rd Armored Div
 - Israel kept focus- Hermon, offensive

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[Lessons Learned]

- Mass
 - Israelis had to sacrifice mass for time
 - Overcame Syrian mass with gunnery
- Economy of Force
 - Syrians should have used paratroops
 - Israelis used forces well

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[Lessons Learned]

- Maneuver
 - Israeli counter mobility effective
 - Syrian tunnel vision limited effectiveness
- Unity of Command
 - Syrians very centralized, reduced initiative and autonomy
 - Israelis started out terrible, adapted and overcame

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[Lessons Learned]

- Simplicity
- Surprise
 - Syrians achieved absolute surprise
- Security
 - Syrian OPSEC, distribution of AA, SAGGER missiles
 - Israeli lack of combined arms approach

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[Conclusion]

- The Israeli's won the battle for the Golan Heights because of superior gunnery and effective maneuver and flexibility
- The Syrian's lost the battle because of an inability to mass and maneuver effectively while failing to maintain offensive momentum