The First Half Hour Of The Six-Day War (Part 2)

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SUICIDE MISSION

On Iyar 5, 1967, as Israel celebrated Yom Haatzmaut (Independence Day), Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser sent his troops to invade the Sinai Peninsula. The Arab states never accepted the existence of a Jewish state and did their best to destroy it. The words of a professor of Jewish history, Solomon D. Goitein, to a group of colleagues from the Hebrew University who advocated the establishment of a binational state in Palestine, represent for me the best explanation to understand why the Arab countries tried to destroy Israel in the past and why “now” we have new opportunities for peace. Goitein said in 1948: “*I am not willing to risk my life for a peace pact with them [the Palestinians and the Arab states]. Because I know that there is no possibility of peace with them, as long as they think they can destroy us.*”

In May 1967 Nasser simply invited the United Nations forces, some 3,500 UNEF soldiers, to withdraw from Sinai, and within a few days, cowardly and in violation of all agreements and guarantees that had been given to Israel, they were gone, allowing Egypt to invade Israel. Israel decided not to wait to be attacked. The Arab armies of Egypt, Syria, Jordan, and Iraq had some 600 planes. Nasser had already announced that his planes were ready to bomb Tel-Aviv. Air superiority would define this war. Israel had only 200 planes and decided to attack with all of them at once on Monday, Iyar 26, 5727 (June 5, 1967). The result of this operation MIBTZA MOQUED would define the fate of the war and the survival of the Jewish

State. It was a very risky and almost suicidal operation because if the Egyptians, who had very effective radars and anti-aircraft artillery equipment, would identify the planes, Israel could lose most of its aircraft and be put in an unimaginable inferior military position to face the enemy. But there was no alternative…

GOD IN HISTORY

At 7:15 am on that Monday, the 26th of Iyar, all the planes of the Israeli air force took off with a mission: to destroy as many military planes and military airports of the Egyptian army. The Israeli planes were flying very low, 20 meters above the surface, and without electronic communication between them, to avoid being detected and attacked by anti-aircraft defense systems.

At 7.45am, Israel's air force attacked simultaneously eleven Egyptian military airbases, in Sinai, Suez, and El Arish. Israel first destroyed the runways with concrete-penetrating bombs so that no enemy planes could take off. And once the runaways were disabled, they destroyed the enemy planes on the ground. By 9:05 a.m. that morning, Israel had wiped out half of the Egyptian air force and rendered most of its runways inoperable.

The question is: how did this happen? Why the Egyptians did not shoot down the Israeli planes? How did it happen that all the Israeli air force planes reached their destination? Why they were not attacked by the Egyptian anti-aircraft artillery? What happened to the Egyptian planes, MIG, which Israel feared so much? How did it happen that all Israeli planes but one, returned safely to their bases?

One of the most important messages of the book of Tehilim is that is our duty to "identify" God's intervention in Creation, in nature, and also in history. In the Six-Day War, there were

certain “providential events” –particularly three events in the span of the first half-hour of the war–that in isolation might be considered a lucky coincidence, but when combined, reveal that it was the Hand of God that allowed Israel to survive and succeed in Israel’s most difficult time.

We will see now the first of these three “miracles”.

VIP IN THE AIR

On the night of Sunday, June 4, 1967, the Egyptian Army High Command decided to make an inspection trip to the Sinai Peninsula to examine the troops that were stationed there awaiting the orders to attack Israel. In that VIP delegation were, among others, the vice president of Egypt, the prime minister of Iraq and the Egyptian minister of war. The Egyptians decided that the delegation would leave on June 5 at 7:00am, and subsequently the Egyptian military command suspended the activation of any type of artillery or anti-aircraft defense system between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning, to prevent the planes of this important delegation from being attacked mistakenly by friendly fire.

Thus, while the Israeli planes were flying over the Sinai towards their destinations, the Egyptian defense systems were not operating. The order was that in an emergency situation the reactivation of the anti-aircraft artillery would have to be obtained directly from the Minister of War, who was at the time flying to Sinai.

At 7:45 in the morning, when the Israeli planes arrived at the enemy’s military airbases, the Egyptian soldiers in charge of anti-aircraft defenses wanted to operate the anti-craft weapons but their commanders prevented that because they had strict orders from the Ministry of War. When they finally understood what was happening, it was too late. Israel had already destroyed half of the Egyptian air force.

WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED?

If the Egyptian military delegation had not been in a flight between 7:00 and 8:00 that morning, the anti-aircraft defenses would have been active, and normally a large number of Israeli planes – perhaps most – would have been shot down, before reaching their destination.

Finally, part of the reason why I think that we should refer to this "coincidence" as "Divine Providence" is that **Israel did not have any intelligence about that VIP flight! They had no idea that the aircraft weapons will not be operating.**

There were other "providential" events that occurred that same day between 7:00 and 8:00 in the morning that allowed Israel to win the Six-Day War in half an hour.

To be continued

PS: *It is worth remembering that the Israeli pilots identified the VIP delegation and asked permission to attack those large Soviet planes, Ilyushin 14, which were carrying the high-ranking Egyptian army officers. The Israeli command did not authorize the attack for fear of causing civilian casualties.*