

Effects-Based Operations: The Yom Kippur War Case Study

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Abstract

The end of the Cold War and rise of the Information Age challenged the United States to re-examine its strategic approach to military and political conflicts. No longer fearful of a nuclear showdown with Moscow and armed with new sophisticated technology, the United States began to prepare to fight wars of a lesser scope than they had previously envisioned.

One thing that did not change about the United States approach to military planning was the fundamental role reserved for diplomacy and operations other than war (OOTW) in strategic planning. These operations are now commonly referred to as effects-based operations, or EBO. USJFCOM defines EBO as, "A process for obtaining a desired strategic outcome or "effect" on the enemy, through the synergistic, multiplicative, and cumulative application of the full range of military and nonmilitary capabilities at the tactical, operational, and strategic levels." While the term effects-based operation is new, the concept's logic has been used by military planners for centuries. After all, if military operations are planned by rational actors, what operation is not effects-based? Military planners should theoretically always intend to achieve positive results. Even military operations that the Clausewitzian trinity would label as irrational – the primordial violence provoked by hatred and enmity – are arguably effects-based, as they often intend to devastate or demoralize the enemy.

The importance of effects-based operations as a viable military concept is quickly becoming recognized by DoD planners. This is, perhaps, in part because the concept is new in name only. In 1973, the Nixon administrations' use of U.S. political and military forces on October 23rd – 24th successfully shaped Soviet behavior and thus provides an excellent example of a successful modern day effects-based campaign. This paper is a case study of American efforts at the height of tension between the superpowers during the Yom Kippur War. It will examine the important aspects of effects-based operations using the DIME construct as a tool for assessment.

Introduction

Effects-based operations (EBO) is not a new concept. Strategic leaders have used EBO's principles of war-planning to solve foreign policy crises without explicitly acknowledging it as a guiding principle. The diplomatic, information, military and economic (DIME) construct has been chosen to analyze the 1973 Yom Kippur War because it effectively organizes and classifies the chronological steps of a historical event, an essential element to assessing any EBO.

The 1973 Yom Kippur War lends itself to analysis as an EBO because it highlights the threat of nuclear war. The relevant actors knew the likely outcome of the application of nuclear forces – mutually assured destruction. Because the potential outcome was so extreme, each state actor made strategic moves that they knew the other side would see clearly and were less likely to misinterpret. The nuclear dimension exaggerated the actions of each actor, thus making their actions more easily discernible than other cases

of diplomacy.¹ While not all decisions were recorded, there are some declassified documents that describe the high-level negotiations that occurred during the crisis.

Definitions

There is no real consensus on a definition for effects-based operations. For the purposes of this paper, the definition will combine parts of the definitions used by U.S. Joint Forces Command and Ed Smith in *Effects Based Operations*. EBO, then, is a process for obtaining a desired strategic outcome or “effect” on the enemy by shaping the behavior of others.²

Historical Background

The story of the 1973 Middle East crisis began with the Six-Day War. On June 5, 1967, Israel launched a preemptive air assault near the Sinai Peninsula, crippling Egypt’s air force. In six days, Israel wrested control of the Sinai Peninsula from Egypt, captured Jerusalem’s Old City from Jordan and gained the strategic Golan Heights from Syria. The Suez Canal was also closed by the war. Israel declared that it would not give up control of Jerusalem and the other captured territories until significant progress was made in Arab-Israeli relations. These captured areas became known as the occupied territories. The Security Council passed UN Resolution 242 calling for Israeli withdrawal. Both sides, however, declared their intent to continue fighting and the region remained volatile. The United States sided with Israel while the Soviet Union supported Arab demands.

During the 1960s and early 1970s, the Arabs and Israelis engaged in sporadic fighting. President Nasser of Egypt died in 1970 and was succeeded by Anwar Sadat, who vowed to fight Israel and win back the territories lost in 1967. In 1973, the Arab states believed that their concerns were being ignored. On October 6, 1973, on the Jewish holy day of Yom Kippur, Egypt and Syria, led by Sadat, staged a two-pronged assault on Israel. After three weeks of fighting, and after the U.S. dramatically re-supplied the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) with ammunition, the Israelis managed to push the Arab forces back beyond the original line.

Meanwhile, the two superpowers continued their geopolitical machinations while the Middle East remained embroiled in conflict and tension. By the 1970s, the two superpowers had developed a close friendship and were keenly aware of each others’ actions. During the late 1960’s, the United States began to pursue a policy of détente which resulted in a general reduction in the tension between the Soviet Union and the United States. U.S. President Richard Nixon chose to pursue detente as a proactive engagement with communist governments rather than the previous policy of containment. U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger played a major role in the development of this policy.

¹ The analysis of the case study is restricted to the higher level decisions that were made with consequences that could be assessed and related to a previous action or event.

² Joint Forces Command and Ed Smith, *Effects Based Operations*, CCRP: 2002.

Kissinger, the Double-Cross Risk, and Hostilities

Hoping to find a solution to the 1973 war, Henry Kissinger flew to Moscow on Oct. 20th and agreed with the Soviets to seek a cease-fire in the region. On October 22nd, the secretary made a visit to Israel for a private meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir and her Cabinet in an attempt to persuade Israel to accept the terms of the cease-fire that had been negotiated between the Soviets and the U.S. Israel resisted the agreement because they refused to forgo destruction of the Egyptian Third Army. The IDF had encircled the Third Army on the Sinai, and they did not necessarily desire to negotiate with Egypt. No changes were allowed to be made in the language of the agreement.

Speculation on what actually happened during Kissinger's talks with the Israeli Cabinet varies. In the terms of the agreement, both sides called for a 12 hour deadline for implementation of a cease-fire. Some observers claim that Secretary Kissinger encouraged Israel to believe that the deadline was flexible and that Washington was prepared to let them finish the encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army. Other versions of the story claim that Kissinger put pressure on Meir and her advisers to strictly adhere to the agreement terms and that both the U.S. and Soviet Union opposed destruction of the Egyptian Army.³

Kissinger departed Israel believing that the conflict was defused and that the war would end. When he landed in Washington on October 23rd, Israel seemed to be ignoring the cease-fire and instead had continued to encircle the Egyptian army. Soviet Premier Leonid Brezhnev sent a hotline message to President Nixon confirming that Moscow felt betrayed. He urged the U.S. to "move decisively to stop the violations," and implied that the U.S. might have collaborated in Israeli actions. When Kissinger learned that the Israelis had completed surrounding the Third Army after the cease-fire deadline, he reportedly exclaimed, "My God, the Soviets will think I double-crossed them. And in their shoes, who wouldn't?"⁴

The Crisis

The crisis began on the morning of Oct. 24th. The Nixon administration had little time to formulate a complex plan to deal with the escalating crisis.⁵ Nixon convened the Washington Special Action Group (WSAG), which was a National Security Council committee designed to deal with serious crises. Participants in the meeting included Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, CIA Director William Colby, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Thomas Moorer, and Deputy National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft.

When the WASG met on the morning of the 24th, Israel and Egypt were still fighting despite two U.N. Security Council resolutions calling for a cease-fire. Fighting had

³ Barry M. Blechman and Douglas M. Hart, "Nuclear Weapons and the 1973 Middle East Crisis," *The Use of Force: Third Edition*, eds. Robert J. Art and Kenneth Waltz, the University Press of America: 1988. Pg. 310.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid* 310.

⁵ *Ibid* 309.

ceased in the north between Israel and Syria, but in the south, the IDF had encircled the entire Egyptian Third Army. The Israelis wanted to use the Third Army as a bargaining chip in future peace talks and would not bow to pressure from Washington to abide by a cease-fire.

The Soviets moved quickly and prepared to intervene on the side of the beleaguered Egyptians. They realized that the Americans had raised the stakes by re-supplying the Israelis and were preparing to react accordingly. They took several military steps that they intended for the U.S. to pick up from their signals intelligence (SIGINT) networks.

On March 24th, Moscow placed four airborne divisions on alert, which added to the three that had been alerted earlier that month. The Soviets has also set up an airborne command post in the southern Soviet Union. In addition, several air force units were alerted. Reports also indicated that at least one of the divisions and a squadron of transport planes had been moved from the Soviet Union to an airbase in Yugoslavia. The Soviets also had seven amphibious warfare craft with naval infantry deployed in the Mediterranean. With some 40,000 combat troops⁶ ready for action, the Soviets posed a serious threat to the military balance on the Sinai.

All of these military alerts caused an increase in Soviet communications, which was picked up by the U.S. SIGINT collection system, thus informing Washington of Moscow's actions. The Soviets knew this, and deliberately wanted these alerts to send a clear signal to the U.S.

The Soviet threat was amplified by the risk of a nuclear attack. The U.S. intelligence community had been tracking a Soviet ship carrying radioactive material that had entered the Mediterranean Sea via the Bosphorus Strait on Oct. 22nd. Three days later, it docked at Port Said at the Mediterranean entrance to the Suez Canal. Unconfirmed rumors lead to speculation that the radioactive material consisted of nuclear warheads. The warheads were believed to be sent to a brigade of Soviet SCUD missiles previously deployed outside of Cairo.⁷

On Oct. 24th, President Anwar Sadat appealed to the U.S. and the Soviet Union to establish a joint peacekeeping force, a move that Washington was absolutely unwilling to accept. President Nixon's response, in the form of a note drafted by Kissinger was blunt: "Should the two great nuclear powers be called upon to provide force, it would introduce an extremely dangerous potential for great-power rivalry in the area."⁸

At the same time, Washington feared unilateral military action by the Soviets. Not only were the Soviets alerting their forces, but Brezhnev stated in his response to Sadat's request that the Soviet Union would be forced to take unilateral action to impose a cease-fire if the United States was unwilling to participate in a joint mission.

⁶ Ibid 311.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Quoted in ibid 312.

After convening a session of the WASG, Nixon ordered a military response to send the message to the Soviets that their unilateral action would not be tolerated. By midnight on Oct. 25th, he ordered the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to raise the alert of U.S. forces to Defense Condition 3 (DEFCON III).⁹ In addition, more than 50 B-52 strategic bombers were ordered to move from their base in Guam to the continental United States, placing them closer to the crisis zone. Airborne tankers, which provided the lifeline for long range strategic bombing missions, were dispersed and prepared for action. In another show of force, Nixon ordered the carrier *USS John F. Kennedy* into the Mediterranean. The 82nd Airborne Division was put on alert and told to be ready to deploy by 6:00 a.m. on the 25th.

The hope was that these alerts would deliver a message to the Soviets. Washington never publicly announced the alerts, but instead counted on Soviet SIGINT networks to intercept the increased signals traffic they generated. The U.S. used communications and other signals intelligence as the major way to transmit the threat designed to prevent a Soviet intervention in the Sinai.¹⁰

The U.S. chose to use diplomatic means to threaten the Soviet Union with nuclear action. Washington responded to Brezhnev's note with a reply given to U.N. Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin early on the 25th. "We must view your suggestions of unilateral action as a matter of gravest concern, involving incalculable consequences," the note read.¹¹ It then made reference to the 1973 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. "In the spirit of our agreements, this is the time for acting not unilaterally, but in harmony and with cool heads." The note then repeated the possibility of "incalculable consequences" if the Soviets intervened unilaterally.

Kissinger again alluded to the threat of nuclear war during a press conference at noon on the 25th at the State Dept. "We possess, each of us, nuclear arsenals capable of annihilating humanity. We, both of us, have a special duty to see to it that confrontations are kept within bounds that do not threaten civilized life."¹² Kissinger's statement, the response to Brezhnev's note, and the DEFCON III status heightening demonstrated to the Soviets that the U.S. was committed to preserving its strategic objectives in the Middle East.

The U.S. actions proved to be successful. The crisis was over within hours of Kissinger's press conference. The Soviet ambassador to the U.N. was ordered to halt his actions to create a bilateral peacekeeping mission on the Sinai and an international peacekeeping force, which did not include U.S. or Soviet peacekeepers, was ratified by the Security Council later on the 25th. Moscow, however, was allowed to deploy 70 observers to verify the cease-fire agreement. At the same time, the Third Army escaped destruction and the Soviets did not send forces to Egypt.

⁹ There are five defense readiness conditions (DEFCONS). DEFCON 1 puts U.S. forces at maximum force readiness, i.e. a state of war.

¹⁰ Blechman and Hart 317.

¹¹ Quoted in *ibid* 317.

¹² Quoted in *ibid* 317.

U.S. Strategic Objectives

The U.S. was willing to use the nuclear threat as a bargaining tool during the 1973 Middle East crisis because the stakes were so high. Blechman and Hart argue that “a threat of nuclear war is credible only in certain situations – those in which the nation’s most important interests are evidently at stake.”¹³ Nixon and Kissinger felt that the threat posed by Soviet unilateral action could undermine the delicate Cold War balance of power. President Nixon acknowledged the gravity of the situation when he remarked in the White House on Oct. 17th, 1973, “No one is more keenly aware of the stakes: oil and our strategic position.”¹⁴

It was important to Kissinger and Nixon to maintain the global perception of the United States as a superpower, especially in the wake of United States weakness demonstrated in Vietnam. Kissinger outlined the American position on Oct. 23rd during a staff meeting at the Dept. of State. “The judgment was that if another American-armed country were defeated by Soviet armed countries, the inevitable lessons that anybody around the world would have to draw, is to rely increasingly on the Soviet Union.”¹⁵

Kissinger also pointed out that an Egyptian victory would “undermine the position in the Middle East, even in countries that were not formally opposing us, such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan, if the radical Arab states [Egypt and Syria] supported by the Soviet Union scored a great victory over the Israelis.”¹⁶

Effects Based Operations: The DIME Construct

Methods of EBO assessment are not well-established because the concept is relatively new.¹⁷ The diplomatic, information, military and economic (DIME) model, however, provides a useful methodology. It is broad enough to encompass the dimensions of the established definition used in this paper. The DIME model serves as a relatively simple representation of actionable arenas.

The DIME terms are defined as follows:

- **Diplomatic:** Negotiation between nations through official channels.
- **Information:** Knowledge of specific events or situations that has been gathered or received by communicating intelligence or news.
- **Military:** Of or relating to the armed forces.

¹³ Pg. 307

¹⁴ Memorandum of Conversation, the White House, Oct. 17, 1973. Unclassified on Aug. 20, 2003. The document can be found at the National Security Archive. www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv. Besides Kissinger and Nixon, Deputy Secretary of Defense Kenneth Rush, Deputy Secretary of Defense William Clements; Director of Central Intelligence William Colby, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Adm. Thomas Moorer were in attendance.

¹⁵ Henry Kissinger, “Secretary’s Staff Meeting,” Oct. 23, 1973. Declassified on March 3, 1998. Available at the National Security Archive.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ As noted earlier, EBO is not a *new* concept, only a newly-recognized concept.

- **Economic:** Of or returning to the production, development, and management of a nation's national wealth.

This case study focuses on events that occurred between when Sadat delivered his letter to the U.N. at 3:00 p.m. on the 24th the end of the crisis on the 25th. This period focuses on the escalating and subsequently defused tension between the two superpowers. The timeline and sequencing of events is listed in figure 1.

The American and Soviet response to Sadat's letter were different. The reasons for this divergence were spelled out in Kissinger's letter to Brezhnev. It stated, "should the two great nuclear powers be called upon to provide forces, it would introduce an extremely dangerous potential for great-power rivalry in the area."¹⁸ This stated intent is the basis of the US's overall desired effect. The means for attaining the effect fell within the DIME construct.

The actions during the crisis can be broken down into seven major actions/reactions. These are outlined on the sequence of events in figure 1. These major actions/reactions are:

- 1- Sadat proposed joint U.S./Soviet peacekeeping force (impetus for the escalation)
- 2- USSR accepted Sadat's proposal
- 3- U.S. rejected the proposal
- 4- Brezhnev sent a note saying the Soviet Union would consider reacting unilaterally.
- 5- U.S. raised alert level to DEFCON 3 and activated strategic forces.
- 6- USSR signals intelligence networks picked up U.S. alert
- 7- U.S. responded to Brezhnev's note with a note to Amb. Dobrynin
- 8- Kissinger held a press conference to tell the world about the crisis
- 9- It was determined that a U.N. peacekeeping force will intervene excluding the major superpowers (U.S. and USSR)

¹⁸ Quoted in Blechman and Hart 312.

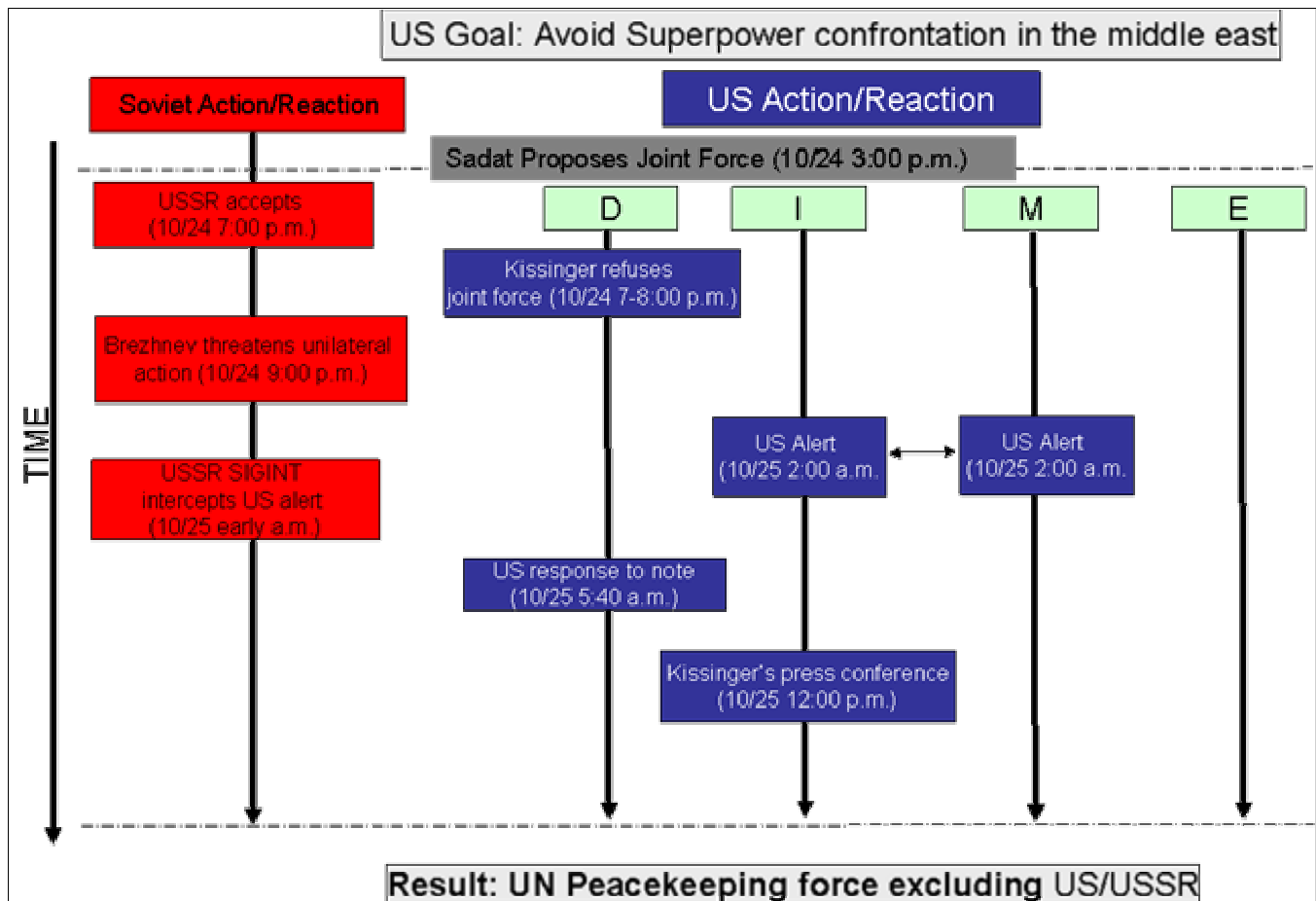


Figure 1: The DIME construct displayed over time

The conflict in this case study was between the Soviet's and the American's different view of appropriate intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The natural starting point of the conflict was when the U.S. declined Sadat's request to become involved, because this was when the U.S. and USSR's views of the level of superpower involvement diverged.

Since this case study exclusively examined U.S. actions (as opposed to Soviet actions), Kissinger's refusal of the joint force is where the analysis began. This action was characterized as a diplomatic action within the DIME model. There was no indication that this was intended to inform anyone other than national diplomats of the American stance on the situation. This action led to Brezhnev sending a note to Kissinger. This action/reaction cycle flowed throughout the analysis. The structure of the timeline was designed to illustrate a relationship between actions and reactions. This was a basic building block highlighted in *Effects Based Operations*.¹⁹

As the cycle evolved, it became apparent how the environment -- diplomatic, information, and military -- proceeded from decision point (or action point) to decision point throughout the crisis. This case study focused on the two superpowers, and thus all

¹⁹ Smith 207.

other variables were treated as exogenous factors that played into the general environment. This is not to say that these third parties were not important, they in fact were a dimension of effects-based operations because they helped guide the options available to the decision makers. Third party involvement was so important that it was indeed the third party (the U.N.) that diffused the situation.

In the context of this case study, the superpowers paid close attention to how their actions would be perceived in the court of global opinion. The perception among citizens of third party nations was discussed during the press conference held on the 25th. This was intended to send a message to the Soviets about the gravity of the situation, as demonstrated by Kissinger's reference to the superpowers' nuclear arsenals.

The categorization of the actions into their respective areas as denoted by the DIME concept was determined by the established definitions. Some actions could have been binned into two or more categories. For example, one could argue that the U.S. alert was issued to send a message to the Soviets rather than to increase force readiness. It can be assumed that the Soviets would know about the alert on or about the same time the U.S. forces were notified. This in effect sent the message to the Soviets that the U.S. was very serious about the potential of armed conflict. For the purposes of this case study, however, each event was binned in only one DIME category.

The final analysis of this case study reveals some interesting phenomena. Breaking down the actions into a structure similar to a decision tree, one realizes that two actions often occur simultaneously. Note the correlation between the military actions and the diplomatic actions. We speculate that due to the potential for a rapid escalation to the use of nuclear force, each country wanted to demonstrate seriousness but allow for a clear path toward diplomatic resolution. This allowed for a leader to “opt out” with ease.

Final Comments:

This case study of effects-based operations assists in understanding the concepts associated with the theory. This understanding is necessary to think through the action/reaction sequences that enable decision makers to think beyond the traditional means of achieving desired effects and in essence utilizing every conceivable method for creating favorable situations and achieving desired effects.

The Middle East crisis of 1973 was a particularly good example of U.S. policy makers planning and making their decisions with an "effects-based mindset." They had an objective in mind and were willing to employ a variety of methods to achieve that objective, rather than incessantly pursuing one type of method (one of the elements of DIME).