

GEHEIM

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Recent UAR/Israeli Incidents

The anticipated Israeli retaliation against the UAR on 19 and 20 July followed a long series of artillery exchanges across the Suez Canal which culminated on 18 July in the death of three Israeli Defence Force (IDF) soldiers and the wounding of five others. The Israelis claim that a force of 30-40 Israeli Commandoes achieved a measure of surprise in an attack upon Green Island, an anti-aircraft fortress in Suez Bay. They occupied the island for an hour, during which they estimated that 50-70 of the garrison of 100 Egyptians were killed, a battery of four 85 mm radar-controlled weapons was put out of action, and several lighter guns destroyed. The Israelis lost six men killed and nine wounded. During the battle, and indeed continuing for two hours afterwards, concentrated Egyptian artillery fire from the Suez area was directed against the island.

2. From this incident an artillery exchange developed along the length of the Suez Canal, but was confined mainly to the southern area. It continued until the early afternoon when the Israelis mounted what was probably a pre-planned series of air attacks, involving a considerable number of aircraft, against Egyptian Army positions to the west of the Canal. During these they claim to have hit SAM sites, mortar positions and artillery batteries.

3. These attacks were followed by a determined Egyptian attempt to retaliate in kind against the areas of Romani, Kantara, opposite Ismailia, and south of Port Tewfik, and possibly made deeper penetrations into Sinai. The large numbers of aircraft involved in this last phase may have confused Israeli radar. Over the past five weeks there has been a build-up of Israeli aircraft in the Sinai. On 24 July there was a further exchange of air attacks on the same pattern as that of the 20 July, in which four Egyptian SU 7s, 2 MiG 17s and one MiG 21 were destroyed. On the 22nd, 25th and 26th July Israeli aircraft attacked Egyptian Army positions west of the Canal, and on 27th July the Egyptians attacked Israeli positions east of it. In the fighting on the Canal, two IDF soldiers were killed, and fifteen were injured,

4. The recent air attacks have marked growing air confrontation between Israel and the UAR. Since 22nd June the Israeli Air Force has shifted to the offensive, and the Egyptian Air Force has responded with more aggressive tactics reflected in the series of air combats, some of them over Egypt, and the serious escalation in operations on 20th July.

5. The Israelis are no doubt hoping to demonstrate undisputed air superiority by seeking to engage the Egyptian Air Force and to destroy it in the air. They have stated that the Israeli Air Force will now play an active role in the Canal area and, although neither side appears to be conducting ground attacks further than 25 miles either side of the Canal it is now obvious that, insofar as air forces are concerned, they are to all intents and purposes at war.
6. During the air combat phase from 22nd June - 19 July the UAR lost nine MiG 21 fighters. Since then in the ground attack phase a further thirteen Egyptian aircraft (seven SU.7s, four MiG 17s and two MiG.21s) have been destroyed. The total of 22 lost represents about nine per cent of the estimated front-line strength of the UAR fighter and fighter bomber-ground attack force. Over the same period Israel has admitted the loss of two MIRAGES.
7. The Israelis claim that the Egyptian air attacks have achieved little damage and only a few casualties to ground forces. However, they admit that the Egyptians have 'improved' and that their attacks on 26th July were of the hit-and-run type, which are difficult to counter.
8. The Israelis appear to be achieving the results in the air that they wish, and, providing the Egyptians continue to accept the challenge they may be content to maintain the present tempo. But both air forces are undoubtedly in a state of advanced preparedness for a major confrontation.
9. The further intensification of military activity was accompanied by a predictably strong statement by President NASSER in his speech on 23rd July to the Arab Socialist Union - on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1952 revolution. This speech provided confirmation that the Egyptians intend to continue the type of operations they have been conducting in recent weeks and they may well intensify them.
10. Further escalation will be very difficult to avoid, and the next Israeli major retaliation may take the form of air strikes against military and economic targets in the Nile delta.