

Isabella Ginor, Gideon Remez. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973: The USSR's Military Intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli Conflict.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017. 400 pp. \$37.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-19-069348-0.

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Ten years after their pathbreaking work, *Foxbats Over Dimona* (2007), Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez have again added to our understanding of the role of the Soviet Union in the conflict between Egypt and Israel.[1] It is clear after examining Ginor and Remez's case that Egypt was more than the Soviet Union's proxy; they were partners in a joint effort to overturn the results of the Six-Day War. Soviet leaders not only supported Egypt's agenda, they had their own goals in the region. Moscow considered Israel to be a nuclear-armed American threat to the Soviet heartland. Therefore Soviet goals became "containment, then reversal of the Israeli gains by military means" (p. 13). The Soviet Union was as much a driver as a sponsor of this conflict that escalated into three wars in seven years.

The nature of the source material available for shedding light on these events has made *The Soviet-Israeli War* as much a work of historical forensics as it is an attempt to write an accurate, updated narrative. Many Israeli records have not been released, and the Soviet Union and then Russia destroyed thousands of relevant documents as a matter of state policy. In spite of those challenges, the authors have analyzed a multitude of existing records written in Hebrew, Russian, and English to piece together seven years of events.

Novels about the War of Attrition and the Yom Kippur War Russian participants wrote after freedoms expanded in the late 1980s form one of the more interesting sets of sources. This was a way veterans could print their stories without explicitly violating secrecy oaths, and the authors fully concede their shortcomings as evidence. They have also found reasons for second-guessing accounts by two individuals who have done a great deal to shape the narrative of this conflict: Henry Kissinger and the "Egyptian propagandist Mohamed Hassanein Heikal" (p. xvi). They disagree with Heikal as to when regular Soviet forces first arrived in Egypt. They argue that they arrived in 1967 and that their presence and activity was constant and ongoing and demonstrate it by noting ongoing activity by Soviet forces in Egypt from that time forward. Egyptian sources for their arguments are few. In the end Ginor and Remez explicitly trust no collective body of evidence because each has significant shortcomings; they have to triple-check each piece of evidence to a degree much greater than many historians examining other topics. Although they stand by their conclusions and argue them well, they are honest enough to remind readers that theirs is not the definitive account because of these evidential challenges.

Ginor and Remez convincingly argue their case by demonstrating how Soviet actions were those of an actor who was an integral part of Egyptian military affairs. Soviet military personnel not only functioned as advisors and trainers to their Egyptian counterparts, they also fought alongside them and even in all-Soviet formations. The latter was most pronounced within air defense operations. Soviet pilots led Egyptians on missions over the Sinai in 1968, and then an all-Soviet MiG-21 fighter unit arrived in December 1969, their Russian-language radio transmissions confirming their identity. In the skies over Egypt, Soviet and Israeli pilots fought each other. On July 30, 1970, for instance, Israeli jets shot down four Soviet MiG-21s but did not publicly identify the pilots as Soviet in order to avoid further inflaming the situation. Other Soviet actions also backfired. Their participation in the sinking of the Israeli warship *Eilat* helped persuade the United States to end its arms embargo on Israel in October 1967.

Each vignette illustrates the authors' point. Egypt began to prepare for another war with Israel after President Anwar Sadat signed a treaty of friendship with the Soviet Union in 1971. Ginor and Remez further illustrate the partnership by noting that the operation to cross the Suez Canal and seize territory in Sinai was "done in full collaboration with our Soviet advisers" (p. 236). Indeed, a 1998 veterans celebration of the Soviet participation in the 1973 War claimed that in addition to 5,000 advisers, 1,500 Soviets "took part in combat" (p. 337). Perhaps the most explicit smoking gun for a Soviet war against Israel they point out is the Israeli tank captured by Soviet special forces in 1973; it now resides in a museum in Kubinka, Russia.

The Soviets' provocative and complex agenda also made an appearance in high politics. When they introduced SA-3 missiles and troops during talk of a ceasefire in March of 1970, Kissinger confronted Anatoli Dobrynin, the Soviet ambassador

to the United States, and compared that to the surreptitious Soviet activity during the Cuban Missile Crisis. Indeed, getting the Soviet Union out of the Middle East became an American policy goal. Soviet premier Leonid Brezhnev, for his part, linked the question of whether the 1972 summit with the Americans would take place to "progress on the Middle East" (p. 240). The progress he wanted, a Palestinian state, was something that Nixon and Kissinger could not deliver and so this goal of Brezhnev's was guaranteed to produce a mark against the United States.

These events are impressive in terms of conniving and deceit, and the authors lay bare the agendas by tracing the connections between them and what took place. In 1973 the Soviets wanted to be less involved in Egypt because the military deployments were expensive, and more involved at the same time because managing a proxy war with Israel was in the national interest. Egypt and the Soviet Union spun a myth that the former was expelling the latter, when in fact, nothing of the sort took place. Ginor and Remez make their case by showing that Soviet planning to deploy replacement forces and house "expelled" dependents began well before the supposed expulsion took place. The Soviet navy redeployed marines to the eastern Mediterranean for possible use in the Suez Canal Zone, and the setting aside of hotel rooms in Kiev for dependents returning from Egypt was a mark of prior planning, not reacting to a sudden eviction by a client state. The authors infer that both states benefited from the ruse: the Soviets could inform their public that the costly expedition was no more and the Egyptians' pride was aided because they were supposedly more on their own as a military force.

Ginor and Remez suggest in another interesting finding that these staged disagreements between the Soviets and Egyptians were also designed to make Egypt appear weaker and less ready for war than it was. Judging from the re-

sponses of the Israelis, this disinformation effort worked.

In explaining these activities the authors could have been more explicit in their conclusions. Their approach is to provide a series of examples to lead the reader to the verdicts they have reached, but at times this is too subtle. Ginor and Remez seem to want to avoid overstating their case, but in doing so they force the reader to pay very close attention to the details and connections within their narrative.

This review is only a teaser regarding the historical findings the authors put forth; there are too many to address in a review of this length. Readers should not be put off by the taut characteristics of this work's writing because that is a consequence of the nature of the sources the authors have at their disposal and their determination to put forth their case with precision. So many factors were so interconnected that the authors' task was akin to transcribing a three-dimensional sphere onto a two-dimensional plane—not easy. *The Soviet-Israeli War, 1967-1973* deserves a wide readership. Historians of the wars, the region, détente, the Cold War, diplomacy, and military affairs will all find new information herein. Curious readers outside of political and academic circles will also find themselves scratching their heads with surprise after each page. Aficionados of the Cold War fiction of John LeCarre and Tom Clancy will experience a different kind of page-turner. Geopolitical actors would do well to read it because it would make them more aware that the scheming they should expect from political actors exceeds credulity.

Note

[1]. This review reflects the views of the author only and not those of the Department of Defense, the US Air Force, or Air University.

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