50
YEARS
to Yom Kippur War

TEACHERS GUIDE no. 2
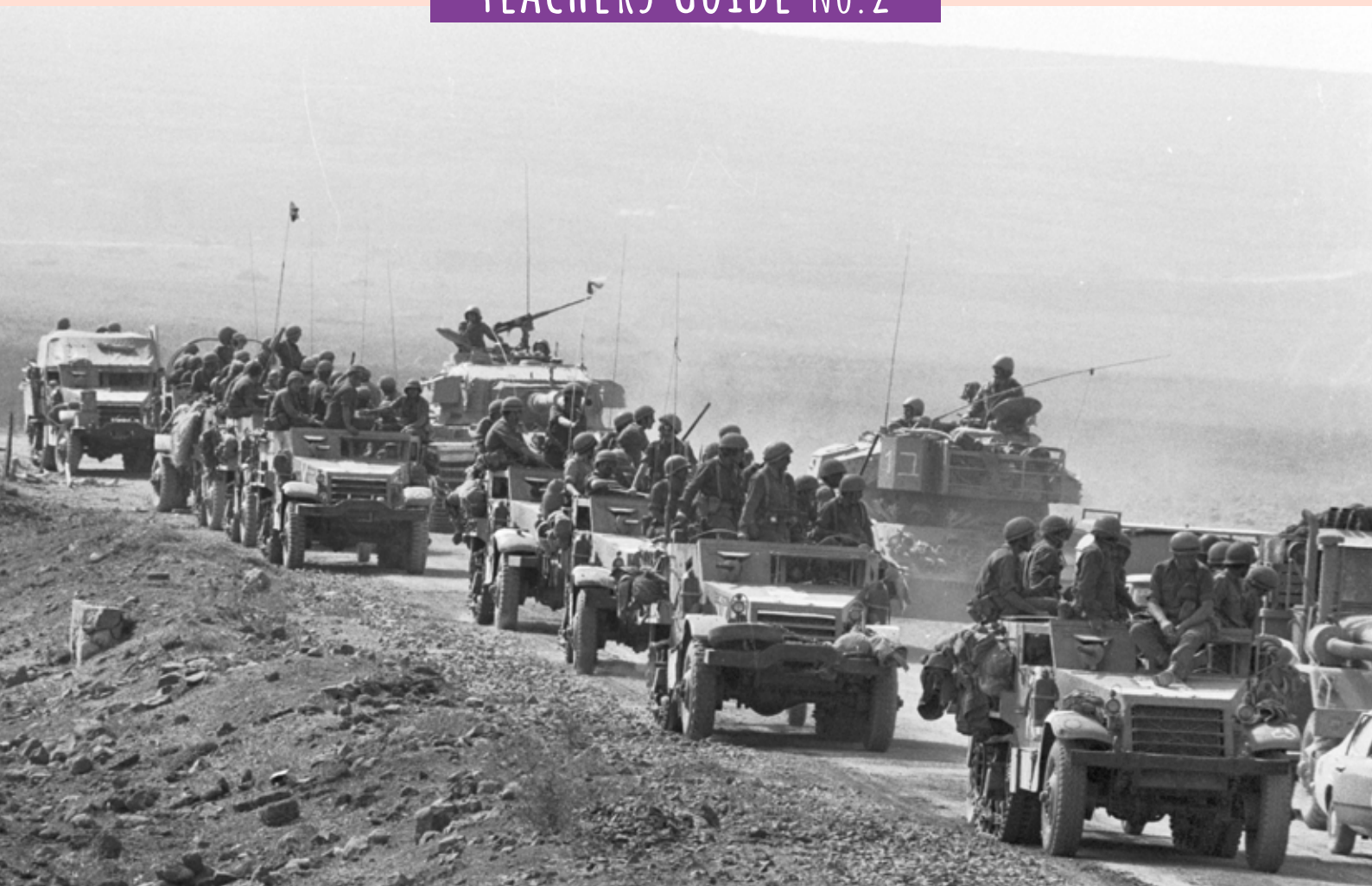
part 2 - YOM KIPPUR WAR

The conception and the intelligence failure

Lesson Scope

Students will learn about the intelligence failure prior to the breakout of the war and how the commitment to the "concept" prevented decision-makers to interpret and analyze correctly the data they had available and decide on appropriate actions. Among the mistakes was the failure to mobilize the reserves in time which precipitated heavy casualties int he early days of the war.

Lesson Objective

Students will identify:

A.
The intelligence department's failures with respect to warning about the likelihood of war.

B.
The influence this lack of warning had on the initial decisions of the Israeli political leadership.

C.
The dangers of cognitive biases on decision-making.

Lesson Plan

- Begin the lesson by showing side by side two pictures from the Six Day War: a) the three soldiers at the Kotel; b) the shoes abandoned by the fleeing Egyptian soldiers.

- Ask students which of the two pictures is more helpful for understanding the Yom Kippur War. It is likely that they will say the picture of the soldiers at the Kotel. This picture reinforced the view that the Israeli soldier was extremely capable while the picture of the shoes reinforced the idea that the Arab soldiers were not professional and well trained.

- This opinion encouraged the Israeli leaders that the air force and standing army would be able to hold off any Arab attack until the reserves could be mobilized and brought to battle. With the arrival of the reserves it was believed that Israel would be able to move from the defensive to the offensive.

- In slide 3 - This cartoon reflects the Israeli mentality that any war with the Arabs would be easy and quickly won.

- From the two pictures we see that the one of the soldiers at the Kotel symbolizes the victory but the picture of the shoes and the cartoon demonstrate the exaggerated sense of confidence and hubris which cause the unquestioning acceptance of the "concept."

- Furthermore the Egyptian failure during the War of Attrition and the tactical successes of the IAF during that war increased Israel's confidence and this manifested itself in Golda Meir's pronouncement a number of days before the war that "Israel's position has never been better."

- After slide six start the matching game based on the "concept"

- Each student will get a card and match their cards up. Students will be able to match the:
  a. situation in the field,
  b. the analysis according to the "concept"
  c. The reality of what was happening
  d. The relevant cognitive biases

- Each group will have one of the following code words:
  e. Sadat
  f. Alertness
  g. The Means
  h. Hussein
  i. The Soviets
  j. Exercise
  k. Marwan

In the teacher prefers he can use the next two slides, slides 8 & 9, instead of the matching game, in these slides some examples from the game are presented.

The following is additional information to use in the matching exercise:

- The "concept" established that despite the fact that Egypt had strategic weapons that could threaten Israeli population centers, Egypt would not attack until she had neutralized Israel's air superiority. It also maintained that Syria would not attack without Egypt.
- In May 1973 (five months prior to the war) Israel mobilized her reserves due to an intelligence warning that Egypt was poised to attack. Eli Zeira remained calm throughout and downplayed the chances of war. When the threat did not materialize Zeira's credibility increased as did the value of his opinion in Moshe Dayan's mind.
- Eli Zeira had tremendous confidence in the "concept" and therefore assessed the probability of war as very low. This was despite the fact that there were very clear indications in the field that Egypt and Syria were preparing for war. His staff dismissed this evidence and explained the events in the field as being in line with the "concept" and that what was seen on the canal was part of a military exercise.
- At this time Israel had access to "special means" that enabled them to listen in on the phone lines of Egypt's military leadership. Israeli intelligence believed that if Egypt was planning to go to war they would be able to intercept this information. Eli Zeira controlled this apparatus but did not activate them prior to the war since he felt that war was unlikely.

This being the case he did not want to take the chance of exposing the "special means" by activating them unnecessarily. He seemingly misled his superiors by indicating to them that he had activated them but had heard nothing. This information help convince the leadership not to mobilize the reserves on October 4-5 due to the economic strain mobilization would cause.

- On the morning of October 6 Israeli leaders received intelligence confirming that war would break out that day toward evening from the Mossad agent Ashraf Marwan. (Marwan had met with Zvi Zamir, the director of the Mossad the night before in London). Israel's leaders, who were still not entirely convinced that war would break out, declined to authorize a preemptive strike so as not to alienate the United States. They also believed that the standing army could contain any attack. However, Golda Meir authorized a partial mobilization.

The following is additional information about cognitive biases –

There were a number of cognitive biases that influenced the intelligence officers and political leaders. Cognitive biases influence people subconsciously in subtle ways. There is evidence that the following biases were present in the week before the war.

1. Confirmation Bias: This bias influences people to favor information that confirms their already held positions and opinions. This manifested itself in the days prior to the war by Israeli intelligence officers believing Egyptian deception efforts that pointed to military exercises and not war.

2. Disconfirmation Bias: This bias influences people to discredit information that does not support their positions. This manifested itself prior to the way by Israeli intelligence officers discrediting information that indicated war and did not support the military exercises hypothesis.

3. Overconfidence Bias: This bias influences people to overvalue their capabilities and their potential for success. This manifested itself in the days prior to the war by Israeli leaders believing that the standing army could successfully deal with any attack by the Arab armies.

4. Recency Bias: This bias influences people to disproportionately rely on readily available information (recent information is one such example). This manifested itself in the days prior to the war by Israeli leaders believing that the Arab armies would fight the same way they did in the Six Day War and that therefore the standing army and air force would be able to contain them until the reserves were mobilized.

5. Groupthink: This is a mode of thinking that is characterized by self-deception. It forces conformity and discourages dissent. This manifested itself in the days prior to the war by senior Israeli intelligence officers preventing dissenting opinions that believed war was imminent from being heard and considered.

Enrichment materials

1. Cartoon - National Library website - https://blog.nli.org.il/srulik_in_six_days/

2. Yum Kippur War, Wikipedia - https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%9E%D7%9C%D7%97%D7%9E%D7%AA_%D7%99%D7%95%D7%9D_%D7%94%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%A4%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%99%D7%9D

3. Wikipedia - https://he.wikipedia.org/wiki/%D7%94%D7%A6%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%94_%D7%A9%D7%A0%D7%A8%D7%93%D7%9D

4. Pictures, Israel Hayom website - https://www.israelhayom.co.il/military-life/world-news-military-life/article/4546774

5. Picture "spy" - https://www.yediot.co.il/articles/0,7340,L-5802055,00.html

2

What is the most significant image for understanding the Yom Kippur War?

1

YOM KIPPUR WAR
Intelligence Failures and Mitigating the Influence of Cognitive Biases

4

The Yom Kippur War –
מלחמת יום כיפור , 10.6.1973, :
The background to the war:

The picture of the soldiers at the Western Wall symbolizes the victory
but
The image of the shoes and the cartoon symbolize the feeling of superiority and caused disdain and an excessive sense of security that caused the concept to be accepted.

What is the concept?

The concept: a wrong worldview. The basic premise was that Egypt, even though it had a skilled army with innovative weapons and high capabilities, would not attack until it had the ability to neutralize the air superiority of the Israeli Air Force, and that Syria would not attack without Egypt due to its military weakness.

3

"The IDF proved on three fronts that its effectiveness transcends all borders", a cartoon by Dosh from the book "Sorry We Won""

NOTES:

5

Actually - Intelligence reports and many signs on the ground indicated an impending war

But

Because they were so caught up in the concept, and did not believe that war would break out, the sirens that went off in the middle of Yom Kippur at 2PM came as a complete surprise

7

Matching Game

6

In addition to the fact that the decision makers fell for misconception, there were also some

Cognitive biases

that influenced the intelligence officers and decision makers.

What are those cognitive biases?
During the game we will understand…

8

the real explanation

Sadat was determined to execute a military operation to capture territory lost by Egypt in the Six Day War. He convinced Syria to partner with him. He ordered his generals to prepare battle plans to capture the Sinai or at least a large part of it to shock Israel.

an excuse based on the concept

Anwar Sadat was perceived as a weak leader. This added to Israel's feeling of security.

the type of cognitive bias

Recency Bias causes humans to disproportionately rely on recent and readily available information when making decisions. Sadat was viewed as a hesitant leader, Israel relied on this assessment and did not test this assumption.

the actual event

In September 1970 Gamal Abdel Nasser, died, president of Egypt. Anwar Sadat was appointed the new president.

Conclusions

All these biases and the concept had a decisive influence on the initial decisions of the Israeli leadership, before and at the beginning of the war.

Before the war, the political leadership and the citizens of Israel felt that the IDF was an invincible army, and that the next war was supposed to be the "seventh day" of the Six Day War.

Everyone thought that the Arabs were militarily inferior to Israel in many ways and that any war that Israel embarked on would end in a crushing victory over the Arab countries.

The Yom Kippur War was a supreme test of this thought. The war did end with a victory manifested in the IDF's advance up to 35 kilometers from Damascus, that is, within the range of the IDF's artillery, and in Sinai with a very severe hit to the Egyptian anti-aircraft system (anti-aircraft defense), and an advance up to 99 kilometers from Cairo,

But the horror of the surprise and the many casualties, and more so the realization that we were very close to defeat, did not let go of the public opinion in Israel and it understood that in a war each side suffers its losses, and these may be large and bitter.

10

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the real explanation   an excuse based on the concept   the actual event

King Hussein's information was correct.

Moshe Dayan and Eli Zeira calmed Golda Meir and claimed that the warning King Huissein delivered was based on a faulty source.

On September 25, 1973 King Hussein of Jordan met secretly with Golda Meir in a very urgent meeting. Hussein reported that the Egyptians and Syrians were preparing to attack Israel and that he declined to join them. Golda Meir passed this information to the defense minister, Moshe Dayan, and to the head of military intelligence, Major General eli Zeira.

the type of cognitive bias

Disconfirmation Bias: This manifests itself by dismissing evidence that contradicts one's beliefs.

Dayan and Zeira fell victim to this bias and thus dismissed Hussein's warning.

9

21