

## The Third Round: The Six-Day War of June 1967

**H**ISTORIANS occasionally err by knowing too much and understanding too little of the unfolding of crises. The diplomatic documents, even when they finally emerge in full, tend to foreshorten and distort the decision-making process as well as to focus and clarify the sequences of events. Beneath articulated rationales lie reasons which even if inarticulate are often compelling. Indeed, the phases of unfolding of the major international crises of the twentieth century are so similar as to suggest an almost biological pattern. Pronouncements and events, the foreplay of the crisis, create a tension and excitement that impels men and nations seemingly inevitably toward a climax. In the growth of the passion of the crisis, strong and rational men are easily swept away by the apparent logic and even necessity of each step in a progression which they neither desire nor can control. Having taken steps A, B, and C, statesmen find it difficult, even illogical, to avoid step D—even when step D is not desirable.

It is fortunate that President Kennedy and other American leaders read and pondered Barbara Tuchman's excellent study of the outbreak of World War I, *The Guns of August*, before the onset of the Cuba missile week. No such warning had been read or, if read, appreciated in the Middle East. There, as we shall see, once the events of May 1967, got under way, they, much like the sequence of moves in a passionate