
BUDS OF LEGITIMACY

During September 1955 Egypt tightened its siege on the Straits of Tiran and closed the air space over the Gulf of Aqaba. Furthermore, at the end of the month Egypt's president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, announced that Egypt was about to sign a large arms deal with Czechoslovakia that would transform the balance of power between Israel and Egypt.¹

Ben Gurion, who had decided after the closure of the Straits of Tiran to respond with military action, sought the West's official legitimacy for the operation. In October 1956, after Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal, Ben Gurion convinced the British and the French, who had economic interests in the canal, that the nationalization was a result of Egypt's strengthened ties with the Communist bloc and that the circumstances for preventive war had ripened. In late October, during a meeting in Paris, Ben Gurion, French prime minister Guy Mollet, and British foreign minister Selwyn Lloyd decided to attack Egypt.

Ben Gurion told the members of his government of the plan—Operation Kadesh—only on the morning of the military operation, October 28, and for the first time he decided to update Begin of the developments as well. The ministers were upset by the late update, while Begin was extremely satisfied: Israel was going to war and he was part of the process.² After briefing Begin, the prime minister told him about a dream he had had in which “the Israeli Army crosses the Jordan River.” The dream—a common prophetic tool of Israel's leaders throughout the Bible—increased Begin's enthusiasm. Several days later, in the midst of the military operation, Ben Gurion fell ill, and Begin, who thought that they were tending a newfound friendship, hurried to