

Armies battle on historically strategic Sinai desert

The desert of Sinai has been the focus of worldwide attention the past few weeks with the outbreak of war once again between Egypt and Israel. With the present cease fire and the upcoming negotiations, it looks as if the Sinai will remain at the center of world politics for some time to come. For many, the Sinai is but a mythic Biblical place where Moses and the Israelites wandered in the wilderness and were given the Ten Commandments. Why should such an inconspicuous place bring the world to the brink of war? The answer lies lost in countless centuries.

By RON EBER
For the Emerald

(Ron Eber, a graduate student in Urban planning, was a Sinai guide with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Israel, during the Spring of 1973.)

Sinai today is as it has always been, a vast desert with great expanses of sand, tall red mountains, narrow gorges, and sprinkled occasionally with lush green oases. It has not changed since the earliest of times, except for a few paved roads along the camel routes and the technological rubble that modern warfare has strewn across its landscape.

Only 125 miles across, Sinai's northern plain is the land bridge connecting the African and Asian continents. Throughout history it has been of strategic import. There is but one settlement, El Arish (the

place of booths), with a population of 30,000 Bedouins, which serves as their chief market place. From here the landscape is rolling dunes of clean sand with a narrow fringe of green palms along the coast extending from horizon to horizon and backed by the blue Mediterranean.

This stretch of palms is civilization's most ancient pathway. Known as "the way of the sea" and later called the Via Maris by the Romans, it was the first trade route between the Old Kingdom of Egypt and Mesopotamia. Along this route the Pharaohs sent their armies and traders east to bring back the riches of Asia and used its vast stretches as a buffer against invaders.

South of the Via Maris is Sinai's other major crossroad. First developed as the way across Sinai to the Gulf of Aqaba by the Egyptians and Nabatians, it became the Darb el Haj (the way of the pilgrims) with the rise of Islam in the seventh century, and the major land route from Northern Africa to the Moslem holy places of Mecca and Medina in Arabia. This route rises from the coastal strip at the city of Suez into the barren hills and through Mitla Pass to central Sinai. Not only the scene of battle in the past 17 years between Egypt and Israel, the remains of Saldain's Date Palm Fortress, Qala at Nakhl, which stood against the Crusaders, guards the pass from a high butte nearby.

Not too far south of the Darb el Haj are the ancient Egyptian turquoise mines at Sarabit el Khadim. Long the main source of beautiful jewelry for the Pharaohs, the miners built a temple in honor of Hathor, Mistress of the Turquoise, overlooking the central tableland of Sinai. Here the canyons about with hieroglyphics and quiet trails become clogged with the porters who carried the tons of supplies to the miners 3500 years ago. Scratched on the walls in nearby caves is an alphabet, developed by these same porters, copied from hieroglyphic symbols that is considered one of the earliest forerunners of the Hebrew, Greek and English alphabets.

Sinai's most notable footnote in history is the Exodus, led by Moses with the Children of Israel, out of Egypt into the wilderness in roughly 1250 B.C. Although scholars are in disagreement as to which way they left Egypt, most feel they went into the high rugged mountains of southern Sinai. Here is the essence of Sinai. Its deep, red granite mountains and narrow gorges give it a grandeur unmatched and an incomparable beauty that is awe inspiring.

No one can be certain as to which mountain is the real biblical Sinai, but deep in these canyons the Byzantine Emperor, Justinian I, built a monastery for his church's monks, in 557 A.D. It stands at the foot of what they believe to be the "the" Mt. Sinai and on the spot of the Burning Bush. The Monastery of Saint Catherine remains today a "Shangri-la in the desert." It is a place untouched by time and contains art treasures that have survived no place else on earth.

In no other place have I been so refreshed as when hiking these fabled canyons, catching ancient panoramas, experiencing the bare rock with lost pools of water and sharing the coolness of green palms hidden in the mountain labyrinth. Seeing this place of beauty and history in the midst of war is shattering, yet in light of its past, understandable. But understanding is shallow in such a place. While there, I drifted back through centuries knowing I had come to the first wilderness. Etched deep in my consciousness was the time I had wandered here before. A place of refuge and meaning, then, it must become so again. It is wrong for such a place to bring us to the brink. Its message was clear when it echoed forth from its canyons "Thou Shalt Not Kill." One can only hope it will be heard once again by its ageless and seemingly tireless warriors far to the north.



Drawing by Marci Ridout

Chinese balance practical, theoretical political goals

By ROBERT ELEGANT
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And SERGE ROMENSKY
Agence France-Presse

HONG KONG — China has welcomed the simmering down of the Middle East conflict and the postponement of Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's visit to a more tranquil time, according to diplomatic sources in Peking.

"The Chinese are pleased by the winding down of the war," explained a senior diplomat, "though they don't like the way it's ending. By the same time token, they'd rather receive Kissinger when the Mideast fracas has cooled down. It would have been a strained meeting at just this time."

The Chinese have found themselves in an awkward position, caught between their ideological protestations and their practical interests. Publicly, China has denounced Washington and Moscow for ending the "just war" by joint action in the United Nations.

In theory, they should have been happy with a war that might destroy Israel, which they describe as an imperialist small power. But, in practice, they abhorred the prospect of greatly enhanced Soviet influence in the Middle East, as a result of an Arab triumph with Soviet backing.

Peking did not want a truce "imposed" by the two superpowers because it weakens China's aspiration to emerge as the leader of the Third World of poorer, underdeveloped nations.

Besides, any and all U.S.-U.S.S.R. cooperation is contrary to China's interests. Peking wants to keep Moscow and Washington as far apart as possible. Only thus can the United States be an effective counterweight to a hostile Soviet Union.

Conflicting interests impelled China to abstain on the Security Council vote on a Middle East cease-fire. And the Security Council heard some of the most vitriolic name-calling in its history — between the Chinese and the Russians.

China's solitary abstention in the Security Council vote on the joint Russo-American Mideast resolution underscores its determination to stay aloof from the "superpower game," experienced observers are saying here.

The Peking view — and the Chinese delegate to the Security Council did not fail to point it out — was that the jointly proposed resolution was a striking demonstration of Soviet and American "collusion."

Delegate Huang Hua declared, before abstaining from the vote, that the resolution would tend to impose "neither war nor peace" on the Arab people — in other words, that it would solve nothing.

His warning was also to be found in Peking's constant reiteration that the Arab countries could only reestablish their usurped rights by acting together and independently of the superpowers.

Foreign observers noted that the Chinese position, notably as it was outlined in the early stages of the conflict in a message from Prime Minister Chou En-Lai to Egypt's President Anwar Sadat, appeared to have been favorably received in Arab diplomatic circles here.

Meanwhile in Uganda...

From Wire-Servic Reports

Oct. 9—Uganda has sent an undisclosed number of troops, to assist the Arabs in the Middle East War, President Idi Amin announced today. Addressing a mammoth Independence anniversary parade, Gen. Amin announced that a whole mechanized battalion had volunteered to fight in the Middle East and there were many volunteers from other Army, Air Force and Navy units.

The Ugandans who had gone to the Middle East had agreed to die for African freedom and their names would go down in the history of African liberation, Gen. Amin declared.

Oct. 10—President Idi Amin threatened to break off diplomatic relations and imprison all American citizens in Uganda if the United States enters the Middle East war.

Amin specifically mentioned that he would imprison American Charge d'Affaires Robert Keeley. He said the Americans would stay jailed until American forces were withdrawn from the Middle East.

The Ugandan president added that all Americans, except American Jews, were still free to come to Uganda as tourists.

Oct. 11—Ugandan President Idi Amin has told the Soviet Ambassador that if Hitler had not

burned 6 million Jews, the present problem in the Middle East would be in the Soviet Union and the whole of Europe, including Britain.

He added that Israeli action in the Middle East had convinced the world that he was right in stating some time ago that Hitler was "right to burn 6 million Jews in Europe during World War Two."

People the world over, he went on, now agreed with him that the Israelis were criminals.

He then appealed to the Soviet Union to supply sophisticated warplanes like the Mig 23 as well as missiles to the Middle East countries to help them counter "Zionist aggression."

Oct. 24—Ugandan President Idi Amin said that God had directed him in a vision today to send messages to Israel and Arab countries urging them to cease fire immediately.

Addressing a mammoth crowd celebrating United Nations Day, he said he had already sent telegrams to United Nations Secretary-General Kurt Waldheim, to Israeli Premier Golda Meir and to all Arab leaders bringing them God's message.

He said his vision was similar to the one he had in 1972 after which he ordered all Asians to quit Uganda. After disclosing his vision, President Amin declared the rest of the day a public holiday.