

As the UNEF II was being established, the US undertook further measures to improve confidence in the region, at the request of the Egyptians and the Israelis. Though devoted at first to political steps, the process had evolved to the point that both sides were willing to consider more practical initiatives by 1975. In November of that year the US established the Sinai Support Mission (SSM).

The SSM, in turn, quickly established the Sinai Field Mission (SFM) to undertake a series of practical steps aimed at enhancing transparency in the Sinai. Working in support of the UNEF II, the SFM established a series of electronic early warning posts at the openings of two passes, which military experience had taught were essential to any attack through the Sinai.¹⁴ The posts were designed, constructed and operated by a private US company under contract to the US Government. All of the stations were in the UNEF II controlled area, and the SFM cooperated with the UNEF II on a daily basis.

In addition to its ground based activities, the SFM undertook a series of aerial reconnaissance missions over the Sinai. These flights, which were conducted at the rate of about one a week, were performed by high altitude, reconnaissance aircraft such as the SR-71 and the U-2R. The resulting imagery was made available to both sides by the US.¹⁵

This seems to be the first time that an aerial reconnaissance operation in the region aimed at either peacekeeping or confidence-building used sensors. At least, it is the first such use of sensors which was expressly foreseen in an arrangement for such activities. Overflights conducted in the service of the UN might have used various methods of recording imagery, but, if they did so, it was not discussed in either their Mandates or their standard procedures. It could be that the two sides have to have a higher degree of confidence in each other and in the third party undertaking the flights in order to authorize the use of sensors than existed at the time any of the earlier missions were established.

With the signing of the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty of March 26, 1979, the SFM moved into a new phase, along with the arrangements of peacekeeping in the Sinai generally. The three parties to the Treaty had expressed the hope that the UNEF II would

¹⁴ The Gidi and Mitla passes. For more on the SFM see Mandell, B., The Sinai Experience: Lessons in Multimethod Arms Control Verification and Risk Management (Ottawa, External Affairs, Canada, 1987)

¹⁵ ibid. For a more detailed description see Smithson, A. "Open Skies Ready for Takeoff" op cit.