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Israel

1967 AND AFTERWARD

By the spring of 1967, Nasser's waning prestige, escalating Syrian-Israeli tensions, and the emergence of Levi Eshkol as prime minister set the stage for the third Arab-Israeli war. Throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, Nasser was the fulcrum of Arab politics. Nasser's success, however, was shortlived; his union with Syria fell apart, a revolutionary government in Iraq proved to be a competitor for power, and Egypt became embroiled in a debilitating civil war in Yemen. After 1964, when Israel began diverting waters (of the Jordan River) originating in the Golan Heights for its new National Water Carrier, Syria built its own diverting facility, which the IDF frequently attacked. Finally, in 1963, Ben-Gurion stepped down and the more cautious Levi Eshkol became prime minister, giving the impression that Israel would be less willing to engage the Arab world in hostilities.

On April 6, 1967, Israeli jet fighters shot down six Syrian planes over the Golan Heights, which led to a further escalation of Israeli-Syrian tensions. The Soviet Union, wanting to involve Egypt as a deterrent to an Israeli initiative against Syria, misinformed Nasser on May 13 that the Israelis were planning to attack Syria on May 17 and that they had already concentrated eleven to thirteen brigades on the Syrian border for this purpose. In response Nasser put his armed forces in a state of maximum alert, sent combat troops into Sinai, notified UN Secretary General U Thant of his decision "to terminate the existence of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) on United Arab Republic (UAR) soil and in the Gaza Strip," and announced the closure of the Strait of Tiran.

The Eshkol government, to avoid the international pressure that forced Israel to retreat in 1956, sent Foreign Minister Abba Eban to Europe and the United States to convince Western leaders to pressure Nasser into reversing his course. In Israel, Eshkol's diplomatic waiting game and Nasser's threatening rhetoric created a somber mood. To reassure the public, Moshe Dayan, the hero of the 1956 Sinai Campaign, was appointed minister of defense and a National Unity Government was formed, which for the first time included Begin's Herut Party, the dominant element in Gahal.

The actual fighting was over almost before it began; the Israeli Air Corps on June 5 destroyed nearly the entire Egyptian Air Force on the ground. King Hussein of Jordan, misinformed by Nasser about Egyptian losses, authorized Jordanian artillery to fire on Jerusalem. Subsequently, both the Jordanians in the east and the Syrians

in the north were quickly defeated.

The June 1967 War was a watershed event in the history of Israel and the Middle East. After only six days of fighting, Israel had radically altered the political map of the region. By June 13, Israeli forces had captured the Golan Heights from Syria, Sinai and the Gaza Strip from Egypt, and all of Jerusalem and the West Bank from Jordan. The new territories more than doubled the size of pre-1967 Israel, placing under Israel's control more than 1 million Palestinian Arabs. In Israel, the ease of the victory, the expansion of the state's territory, and the reuniting of Jerusalem, the holiest place in Judaism, permanently altered political discourse. In the Arab camp, the war significantly weakened Nasserism, and led to the emergence of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) as the leading representative of the Palestinian people and effective player in Arab politics.

The heroic performance of the IDF and especially the capture of Jerusalem unleashed a wave of religious nationalism throughout Israel. The war was widely viewed in Israel as a vindication of political Zionism; the defenseless Jew of the *shtetl* (the typical Jewish town or village of the Pale of Settlement), oppressed by the tsar and slaughtered by the Nazis, had become the courageous soldier of the IDF, who in the face of Arab hostility and superpower apathy had won a miraculous victory. After 2,000 years of exile, the Jews now possessed all of historic Palestine, including a united Jerusalem. The secular messianism that had been Zionism's creed since its formation in the late 1800s was now supplanted by a religious-territorial messianism whose major Yisrad objective was securing the unity of Eretz Yisrael. In the process, the ethos of Labor Zionism, which had been on the decline throughout the 1960s, was overshadowed.

In the midst of the nationalist euphoria that followed the war, talk of exchanging newly captured territories for peace had little public appeal. The Eshkol government followed a two-track policy with respect to the territories, which would be continued under future Labor governments: on the one hand, it stated a willingness to negotiate, while on the other, it laid plans to create Jewish settlements in the disputed territories. Thus, immediately following the war, Eshkol issued a statement that he was willing to negotiate "everything" for a full peace, which would include free passage through the Suez Canal and the Strait of Tiran and a solution to the refugee problem in the context of regional cooperation. This was followed in November 1967 by his acceptance of UN Security Council Resolution 242, which called for "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict" in exchange for Arab acceptance of Israel. Concurrently, on September 24, Eshkol's government announced plans for the resettlement of the Old City of Jerusalem, of the Etzion Bloc-- kibbutzim on the Bethlehem-Hebron road wiped out by Palestinians in the war of 1948--and for kibbutzim in the northern sector of the Golan Heights. Plans were also unveiled for new neighborhoods around Jerusalem, near the old buildings of Hebrew University, and near the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus.

The Arab states, however, rejected outright any negotiations with the Jewish state. At Khartoum, Sudan, in the summer of 1967, the Arab states unanimously adopted their famous "three nos": no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel, no negotiation with Israel concerning any Palestinian territory. The stridency of the Khartoum resolution, however, masked important changes that the June 1967 War caused in inter-Arab politics. At Khartoum, Nasser pledged to stop destabilizing the region and launching acerbic propaganda attacks against the Persian Gulf monarchies in exchange for badly needed economic assistance. This meant that Egypt, along with the other Arab states, would focus on consolidating power at home and on pressing economic problems rather than on revolutionary unity schemes. After 1967 Arab regimes increasingly viewed Israel and the Palestinian problem not as the key to revolutionary change of the Arab state system, but in terms of how they affected domestic political stability. The Palestinians, who since the late 1940s had looked to the Arab countries to defeat Israel and regain their homeland, were radicalized by the 1967 defeat. The PLO--an umbrella


organization of Palestinian resistance groups led by Yasir Arafat's Al Fatah--moved to the forefront of Arab resistance against Israel. Recruits and money poured in, and throughout 1968 Palestinian guerrillas launched a number of border raids on Israel that added to the organization's popularity. The fedayeen (Arab guerrillas) attacks brought large-scale Israeli retaliation, which the Arab states were not capable of counteracting. The tension between Arab states' interests and the more revolutionary aspirations of the Palestinian resistance foreshadowed a major inter-Arab political conflict.

Data as of December 1988

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