

Nasser the cause of the six day war

[History](#), [Middle East](#)



IB Extended Essay Elliott McDermott 4576 To what extent was Nasser the cause of the Six Day War? Word Count: Contents Introduction 3 Israel's role in causing the Six Day War 3 The role of water in causing the Six Day War 6 Nasser and Egypt's role in causing the Six Day War 8 France and Britain's role in causing the Six Day War 11 USA's role in causing the Six Day War 13 The PLO, Fatah and Arab states' role in causing the Six Day War 15 The Soviet Union's role in causing the Six Day War 17 Conclusion 19 Bibliography 20

To what extent was Nasser the cause of the Six Day War? Introduction

Israel's role in causing the Six Day War As with every aspect of history, historiographies have definitely changed over the years where Israel is blamed for the outbreak of the Six Day War. The orthodox view is that Israel launched a pre-emptive strike on its surround countries, however, since then this view has changed. There is one belief shared throughout the majority of historians which is that " today's war is not a new war, but part of the old war" (speech by King Hussein in 1967). [pic] Figure 1: A cartoon by Zapiro in the Mail and Guardian, a South African newspaper, June 2007. As we can see from Figure 1 above, the cartoon is portraying the different historiographies that there have been in the 40 years from 1967 to 2007. The top cartoon (the orthodox view) is showing the ' heroic Israel' acting as a David-like figure defeating the Goliath that was the ' Arab aggression'. However, the revisionist view shows it being the other way round with the Israelis using a boulder rather than the catapult and stones to destroy the Arabs. Other notes are that the revisionist view now argues that the US had a large role to play in it with their funding of the Israeli attacks. During the years 1948-56, Israel was finding itself becoming increasingly involved in border conflicts, as

they could not negotiate any peace agreements. One of the major long-term causes of the Six Day War can be seen when Israel became allied with Britain and France and decided to go to war with Egypt, which became known as the Suez Crisis. In this conflict, Nasser and his Egyptian army destroyed and humiliated the Israelis and their allies. This became a major cause because they wanted revenge and they also wanted to regain the land that they had lost in 1956. Therefore, was not the war only inevitable if this was the mind-set of the Israelis? There were many reasons why the Israelis wanted, more importantly needed, the land back. They were going through a phase of rapid increase in population and they needed the land to allow for immigration. However, with an increase in population there is a higher demand for agriculture, therefore the economy also needed to grow. With this being the case, it can be seen that Israel was a main cause and can be seen as an aggressor in the outbreak of the Six Day War. One of Israel's most aggressive acts was the attack on the village of Samu in Jordan on 13th November 1966. Perhaps the PLO group Fatah can be blamed for this event due to their involvement in the planting of the mine on the border of Israel that killed three people on the 11th. King Hussein received reports that Israel had no intention of fighting in retaliation to this, however on the morning of the 13th, 600 troops were sent across the Jordanian border (Bowen, 2003). It is seen that Israel's goal was to "demolish houses in Palestinian villages... as a show of force to pre-empt future Palestinian violence" (Segev, 2007). They believed that by doing this, they could make King Hussein stop the actions of the Fatah group and also to show to other states that they should not go to war against them. The Arab League Report (Arab League Report, 1966) in

theory stated that the Israel's actions were a test for Egypt and Syria and to see whether they would come to the aid of the Jordanians. In my opinion, if this was the case, Israel did this as a test to see if Egypt would retaliate, in preparation for the potential outbreak of the Six Day War. Following the attacks, Prime Minister Eshkol was questioned about the actions and he stated that the attacks were in retaliation for the attacks that Jordan did to Israel. In his speech he stated 14 attacks by Jordan that resulted in the attack on Samu. In my opinion, I believe that the attack on Samu was a major cause of the outbreak of the Six Day War because many believed that the attack was unnecessary and should have been directed at Syria instead. It can be seen that Israel plays a vital role in causing the Six Day War and can be traced all the way back to their creation. However, the more important events are the incident in Samu and the need of the lost land. Therefore, how much of the responsibility of causing the Six Day War can the Fatah group take for their involvement in Samu? The role of water in causing the Six Day War Figure 2: [pic] (Shemesh, 2004, page 4) The map above shows the Arab diversion plan in Syria. This explains the Arabs' actions as they hoped to achieve the land listed above. Ultimately, it can be seen that these plans are highly significant in causing the war as they would have reduced the capacity of the water carrier by 35% and Israeli's supply by 11% (Seliktar, 2005). This would have damaged both the economy of Israel and relations with its neighbours. " The struggle over water was a major factor in the deterioration of Arab- Israeli relations that led to the Six Day War in 1967" (Shemesh, 2004, page 1). Three demilitarised zones were created on the Israel-Syria border in the 1949 Armistice Agreements following the 1948

Arab-Israeli War (Armistice Agreement 1949). However, problems suddenly occurred due to the issue of sharing water as Israel, Syria and Jordan were all sharing the water supply (Lowi, 1995). In 1964, the National Water Carrier (NWC) was created by Israel to allow the access of water from the Sea of Galilee to the southern parts of Israel, which tended to lack water. It was not only for the access of water though, Israel saw it as a way to increase its level of agriculture and therefore they would have the ability to increase its population. This was a major aspect of Israel's causing of the war. However, it definitely was not intentional. The creation of the NWC was seen upon by the neighbouring states with jealousy. More over, Jordan believed that Israel was stealing the water from them as they both shared the border to the sea. Nasser's role in this was seen as being very negative and was seen to be hiding behind the back of the UN when the Syrian government plotted to destroy the carrier. The dispute between the control of the water carrier and the attacks by the Israelis that followed it has to be something that must be considered one of the factors to the outbreak of the conflict. Nasser and Egypt's role in the cause of the Six Day War Following Israel's rise to independence in 1948, war between Israel and it's near by countries was always going to break out and that was the case (Shemesh, 2006). The outbreak of the Six Day War can be followed all the way back to the 1948 War in which the Egyptian army was left in humiliation (Ovendale, 2004). For the Egyptians and Nasser, they wanted to get revenge for how they were left after that war. Particularly Nasser, who cared a lot about this image in the Arab world, which was starting to get very dented due to the humiliation that he faced after the war. I believe that it is fair to say that the Six Day War

perhaps would not have broken out if there had been a peace agreement created between the Arab states. However, as nothing was ever created, there were continuous border raids and none of the countries involved could ever relax and settle with each other. Following victories over the British, French and Israelis in the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, Nasser became a hero in the Arab world. This can be seen by many Arabs seeing Nasser as a conqueror of Zionism simply because the British, French and Israelis left the Sinai and Canal Zone (Varble, 2003, page 84). He became a leader for the Arab world and his belief for pan-Arabism he created the UAR (United Arab Republic) in 1960, which was to great popularity in the country. Nasser's ultimate goal was to unify all of the Arab states. I believe that this is very important to note, as it shows what his ultimate goal was. Therefore, were his actions just to unify the Arab states? Another one of Nasser's main plans was to bring Egypt into the modern world, therefore he began to make important connections with other countries such as Czechoslovakia, in which they made an arms deal in 1955. Even though Nasser wanted to have a leader-like figure, many people started to doubt him and believed that he was hiding behind people's backs, particularly the UN. As he did not want to seem like he was hiding behind their backs, he then decided that he must take action. I believe this is where Nasser went wrong, to prove that he was not letting the UN control him he started raids on neighbouring states. In my opinion, this was completely the wrong thing for Nasser to do. Nasser made it difficult for him to prove that he wanted to "unify" the Arab states after Egypt's actions and views differed to that of other Arab states, for example the Yemeni Revolution in 1962, where Egypt and Saudi Arabia backed

different groups. After a while, Egypt's relations with the US started to decrease hugely after Nasser was almost acting in a paranoid manner following trying to get various Egyptian intelligence to attempt to assassinate Jordan's King Hussein. In my opinion, I do believe that one of the decisive factors in the breaking out of the Six Day War was due to Arab state rivalries. It was surprising to see that, even after the attempted assassinations, King Hussein still trusted Nasser with his military power. In an attempt to show that he was a leader, Nasser got rid of the UN troops in the Sinai in May 1967 to prove that he was the one in control of the UN's actions. The reason behind this is that he wanted to get rid of the buffer zone to allow Egypt to invade and destroy the Zionist state. It can also be seen that Nasser only wanted to withdraw the UNEF so that his troops were not vulnerable to an attack. Another hugely damning action that Nasser did was creating the blockade in the Straits of Tiran of Israel. This was an action that caused the Israeli government huge problems, as it was their transport route and main port. This action by Nasser was only inevitable to cause conflict between the two states. I am unsure whether these actions by Nasser were intentional to cause conflict or if to just damage the Israeli economy. Even though Nasser appeared to challenge Israel to war, there is strong evidence that he never expected or intentionally intended war to break out. France and Britain's role in the cause of the Six Day War France had been a close ally with Israel which began between the years of 1940-44 during the Zionist Movement and while the French were under occupation from the Germans in World War II. On 12th January 1949, France recognised the existence of Israel and supported them in joining the United Nations. The 1950s was a decade of

very close relations between the two and in 1953 the French agreed an arms deal with Israel and became key weapons supplier to Israel during the 1950s and 1960s. Ultimately, Nasser's actions for the Suez Canal provoked Israel to ask for support from the French as they both saw Egypt's attack inevitable. France's response to this was to send fighter jets to increase Israel's airforce and to allow them to prepare for war. The war brought relations of France and Israel closer together and also combined British relations as they planned to regain full control from the Egyptians of the Suez Canal. The French perhaps kept interest in Israel due to its empire was quickly deteriorating and therefore they could not afford to lose yet another nation, particularly after Algeria — one of France's valuable nations — had been targeted by many of the Arab states. It is seen that the Britain, much like many other countries, stayed close with the Arab states due to their vast oil supplies. The threat of communism was also something that the British wanted to eradicate and they knew that keeping Israel secure would allow the Middle East to stay stable. Similar to the French with Israel, the British supplied them with weaponry to stay secure, however, British Prime Minister McMillan stated that they did "not give the Israelis arms because they are pro-Western or because we admire their achievement. We give them arms because our interest in the Middle East is to keep quiet and to prevent war." (Gat, 2006, page 54). This shows the position of the British government who clearly wanted to protect Israel and not to encourage Egypt into war with them.

The United States' role in the cause of the Six Day War

The United States knew that the Arab states, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon and Jordan, held huge importance economically and therefore they tried to

maintain problem-free relationships but sometimes they became slightly strained. As they had a rather large Jewish population, they knew that they also had to support Israel. Therefore, as we can see, relations between USA and Egypt used to be in a stable condition, however after the invasion of Yemen by Nasser, USA turned and helped Saudi Arabia knowing they were an important oil source. (Oren, 2002) In 1963, there was a turning point and the US became influenced by the views of the Zionists and therefore started to supply Israel with military aid and gave them Hawk surface-to-air missiles (Oren, 2002). This is one aspect that could be seen as negative when the USA, particularly President Johnson, chose to end economic aid to Egypt. By doing this, they allowed Egypt to become more reliant on the Soviets and thereby also allowed more influence. This caused huge consequences and, as seen, the Soviets played a pivotal role in causing the Six Day War. The Egyptians then began to spread pro-Soviet views throughout the Arab states with the support of the Soviets. With this, there became a clash of the two superpowers trying to dominate the Middle East and influence it more than the other; this created a sub-war for the Cold War. As many of the causes are long term, the Six Day War can be traced back to the Suez Canal Crisis of 1956, where USA's involvement can perhaps be seen as a case of the Six Day War. Following the Suez Crisis, President Eisenhower allowed Israel the free right of way through the Straits of Tiran and backed the establishment of the UNEF (United Nations Emergency Force) resolution between Egypt and Israel. The US were very precarious with their involvement in a potential new conflict as they knew that they did not want to have a war on two fronts, as they were currently still fighting Vietnam at the time. Therefore, the US

decided to become involved on more of a diplomatic approach, which evidently failed and caused much more problems. The PLO, Fatah and Arab states' role in the cause of the Six Day War The aim of the PLO when it was founded in 1964 was to keep Palestine as one which was stated in the PLO Charter of 28 May 1964 and to prohibit " the existence and activity" (Shemesh, 2006, page 2) of Zionism. However, the PLO was unable to achieve its goal without the use of attacks and therefore it directed guerrilla attacks from Arab states such as Jordan and Syria. It is seen that one of the major causes of the Six Day War was the creation and use of the group called Fatah. As Moshe Shemesh wrote " the Six Day War was the fulfilment of Fatah's basic goal: to ensnare the Arab states in a war with Israel" (2006, page 2). Due to the Fida'iyyun continual attacks on Israel it provoked them to increase the violence on their retaliations and ultimately led to the raid on a village in Jordan called Samu'. However I do not believe that they can be solely held responsible for their actions, this is because they just have been given a reason for their actions. In my opinion I feel that the heavy backing provided by Syria to the Fida'iyyun organisations gave the Fatah money for their needs such as training, weapons and ammunition. By the end of 1966, the PLO and many other organisations were all " taking an active part in sabotage operations" (Shemesh, 2006, page 2). Evidence to this is that the PLO conducted 41 terrorist raids against Israel, particularly on 11th November, when a Fatah mine killed three soldiers (The Israel Project). The Israelis were able to use this as a legitimate reason to retaliate against the Arabs. The formation of the PLO led to extremely intense border issues for Israel, due to the sabotage acts that were taking place within. However it is

seen that perhaps the Israelis over exaggerated tensions, which was shown when the Fatah “ set off a small explosive device that caused no damage whatsoever” (Shemesh, 2006, page 3) and the response of the “ near-hysterical publicity” (Shemesh, 2006, page 3) proved all. Jordan and Lebanon tried limit the PLO activity due to fear of a bigger Israel retaliation that would ultimately damage them more. This came through the incident at Samu. The Syrians encouraged the PLO to continue with their actions and supplied them with both men and weapons. Nasser’s reputation and image was starting to take a lot of damage and was being dented significantly due to a rising tension across the Middle East and because of the fact that Nasser was not acting in the way that his followers expected him to. In a hope to limit the tension, Egypt signed a peace agreement with Syria in November 1966. However, due to unexpected circumstances, this was not the case and in fact the drive to go to war against Israel increased even more and the tensions blew out of control. It is seen that the Fatah’s attacks became more intense each time and escalated over time, eventually making the Israeli’s retaliations even more extreme. The Soviet Union’s role in the cause of the Six Day War It is seen that the Soviet Union played a crucial role in the cause of the Six Day War. This is the case because they armed the Arab states, allowing them to prepare for war and make other countries suspicious. For the Soviets, it was about expanding their sphere of influence throughout the world in their quest for world domination. However, during the early 1950s, the Soviet Union did not see the potential that it once saw in the Zionist states and therefore moved their support to where they believed it would be more useful — Syria and Egypt. The support was in the form of weapons and

artillery to order to improve their war technology. It is clear that the Soviets believed that a war was inevitable however it is unclear whether the Soviets wanted the war to take place. However, it was shown in the book "The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six Day War" by Gideon Remez and Isabella Ginor, that the Soviets did in fact intentionally cause the war trying to defend their recent attack of an Israeli nuclear plant. In order to protect Egypt and Syria, the Soviets allowed their forces to use their weapons and also created tactics from them to use in the event of a war. Suspicion was perhaps the biggest problem that the Soviets caused in the build up of the Six Day War. The biggest event occurred on the 13th May 1967, when the Soviets sent false reports back to Syria and Egypt claiming that the Israelis had concentrated their troops on the Israeli-Syrian border and were preparing for war. There is proof that these reports were deliberate after a conversation between a CIA agent and a Soviet official. However, it is unsure whether the US made this event up. It is seen that the Soviets sent the reports hoping they could "make some political gains by underlining their own commitment to the Arabs and the pro-Israeli orientation of American foreign policy" (Shlaim, 1996, page 38). What the Soviets did not realise was the response that the Egyptians and Syrians were going to take. Again, it is still unclear whether the Soviets did this intentionally to cause a war, however some historians do believe that they did this to cause a proxy war during the Cold War. It is clear by the response of Michael Oren in his book Six Days of War that he believed that it was a battle between the superpowers when he writes: "The USSR, moreover, was seen as less likely to intervene if Israel acted alone than if the US stepped in on Israel's behalf" (page 165).

Conclusion The conflict that occurred throughout the Middle East can be traced back to the creation of Israel. However, as I have shown in the essay, it cannot be held solely to blame for the outbreak of the Six Day War.

Throughout the period there have been many short and long-term factors that have effected relations and sparked conflict. The Fatah and Fida'iyyun's actions became out of control between 1965-7 and they got more intense and dangerous each time. With these events occurring, more minor events began to magnify such as the sending of false reports by the Soviets caused paranoia through nations. The blockage of the Straits of Tiran, for me, was a very important event. Ultimately, I do not believe that Nasser can be held solely responsible for the outbreak of the Six Day War as there were many other factors that significantly helped the war take place and I also believe that there is sufficient evidence showing that Nasser never intended war to take place.

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