

Analysis of the six day war essay sample



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June 5 1967 Israel delivers a stunning opening blow in the Six-Day war. Within a few hours, the Israeli airstrike devastated the Egyptian air force. Fighting on three different fronts against the combined might of three Arab armies; Israel would win a war within six days. Research on the causes of the Six-Day war, and the military tactics can help one understand how Israel achieved this astonishing victory, and how the results of this war affect Israel today.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) was introduced by the Arab League in 1963. Yassar Arafat was the leader of the largest faction of PLO, known as the Fatah. Each faction adhered to a set of principles, which called for Israel's destruction, given by the Palestine National Charter. In 1965, 35 raids were conducted against Israel. In 1966, the number increased to 41. In just the first four months of 1967, 37 attacks were launched. The targets were always civilians (Bard). The main objective was to harass the Israelis, but a secondary objective was to undermine King Hussein's rule in Jordan. King Hussein viewed the PLO as a direct and indirect threat to his power; he feared that they might try to depose him. Because of his fears, Hussein had the PLO offices in Jerusalem closed, arrested members of the PLO, and withdrew recognition of the organization, thereby betraying the Arab cause. A major cause of conflict between Syria and Israel was Syria's objection to Israel's decision to take water from the Jordan River to supply the country with the creation of a National Water Carrier. The Syrian army used the Golan Heights to shell Israeli farms and villages, forcing citizens to sleep in bomb shelters.

These attacks finally provoked a retaliatory strike on April 7, 1967. During the attack, Israeli planes shot down six Syrian fighter planes. On May 15th, Egyptian soldiers began to move into Sinai Desert near the Israeli border, and on May 18th, the Syrian soldiers stationed along the Golan Heights. Egypt closed Straights of Tiran to all ships bound for Eilat, cutting off Israel's only supply route with Asia, and stopping the flow of oil from Iran. On May 30th King Hussein of Jordan signed a defense pact with Egypt. In early June 1967, tensions in the Middle East were rising. Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser had called on the Arab nations to destroy Israel. War seemed inevitable. Israel faced the grim prospect of a simultaneous invasion from Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. The combined Arab armies had a massive superiority in numbers of soldiers, tanks, and fighter aircrafts. The general mood in the Arab world was that Israel could be defeated because it was not that strong; yet against most expectations, the opposite happened. Israel decided to preempt the anticipated Arab attack using the element of surprise. On June 5th, Prime Minister Eshkol gave Israel the order to attack Egypt.

In less than a week, Israel had defeated its Arab neighbors. To understand the reasons for Israel's victory, it is necessary to go back to the early 1960's. At that time, Yo'ash Tsiddon was chief of planning in the IAF, the Israeli Air Force. A military coalition between Egypt and Syria meant Israel would be facing battles on at least two fronts: It could expect attacks from Egypt through the Sinai and from Syria through the Golan Heights. It also seemed possible that both Jordan and Iraq would add their weight to the Arab force. The best form of defense would be a strong offense, a preemptive strike. The

Israelis could not afford to give their all against all the Egyptians, Syrians, and Jordanians, at the same time; The Israelis' need to concentrate on one enemy at a time. To fight the war the way it wanted, Israel would need to gain air superiority.

In 1964, Tsiddon's team came up with the unorthodox plan to strike their enemy's airstrips. The primary objective was to keep the Arab air forces on the ground by disabling their runways. The only problem was that their enemies had more than 50 runways and Israel had only 206 aircrafts, so it would be nearly impossible to keep enough aircrafts in the air to destroy all their targets. The maximum amount of missions an aircraft could do in 24 hours used to be three missions. A bright staff officer in the Israeli air force realized that the Israeli air force could turn around an aircraft after a mission in six to eight minutes. Everything would depend on how fast the ground crews could work for the aircrafts to complete another mission. The ground crew completed many exercises and drills until they took no more than seven minutes to reload and refuel the aircrafts: If the ground crew worked to their limit, each aircraft could fly up to five mission in one day.

In the mid 1960's Yalo Shavit, one of the leading pilots in the IAF, trained many of the pilots that carried out this mission. Each pilot had to learn and remember by heart the direction of the runways, the amount of runways, the control tower, and the storage of bombs. For over two years, the Israelis practiced this operation codenamed " Mokehd", meaning " Focus". Ground crews competed with each other to see who could turn around a fighter aircraft fastest, pilots bombed dummy airbases (modeled in the layout of the real targets), and they were constantly tested on their ability to memorize

every detail of their mission. Preparations for war on the Arab side progressed at a different pace: They did not prepare for any kind of serious confrontation with Israel. Despite this less intense preparation, on May 14, 1967 President Nasser deployed his troops in the Sinai Desert. Israel responded by mobilizing its reserve army.

On the morning of June 5, 1967 Israel fired the first shots that began the Six-Day war. While most of the Israeli Defense Force's aircrafts were fighting, a small group of troops were left to defend against the Syrians on the northern border. Egypt was hit by a massive preemptive air strike. The Egyptian air force was caught cold and during the first wave of attacks, eleven Egyptian airbases were obliterated. The Israeli plan of targeting runways first had worked perfectly. Unable to take off, Egyptian aircrafts were sitting ducks. Now that Israel gained air superiority, their ground forces could take center stage.

The focus of operations was now on the Sinai Desert, where the borders of Israel and Egypt met. The Sinai Desert consisted of a vast expanse of difficult terrain with impassable sand dunes. The Egyptians had already constructed formidable defenses in the Sinai Desert, so a head on clash would have been potentially disastrous for the Israeli army. They needed to find a way to overcome the Sinai's terrain and the Egyptian fortifications.

In the early 1960's, the Israelis had conducted experiments in their own desert, the Negev. Soldiers practiced driving vehicles in the soft dunes, where they needed to learn how to get themselves out of the sand when they got bogged down. When their vehicles got stuck, the Israelis would

lessen the air in the tires (which gave the wheels more traction) in order to have more contact between the wheel and the ground. The result was that the Israelis could advance in areas of the Sinai that the Egyptians would least expect them to. Within thirty-six hours of the Israeli attack in the Sinai, the Egyptians divisions were ordered to pull back. They retreated west towards the Suez Canal, which took them through three mountain passes. In that state of panic, the Egyptians were all trapped in the three passes in the Sinai, and they became a sitting duck for the Israeli air force. Complete air superiority meant that Yalo Shavit's squadron could strike the Egyptians at will using Napalm bombs. Hundreds of Egyptian tanks and trucks were engulfed in an inferno.

On June 5th, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol sent a message to Jordanian King Hussein telling him that Israel would not attack Jordan unless Hussein initiated hostilities. When Jordanian radars picked up planes that were flying from Egypt to Israel, the Egyptians convinced Hussein that the planes were his own, and ordered Hussein to begin shelling West Jerusalem. The planes were actually Israeli fighters returning from destroying the Egyptian air force. After that, it took Israeli forces only three days to defeat the Jordanian legion. On the morning of June 7th, Israeli paratroopers stormed the Old City and recaptured it.

Even during the searing heat of early June, the Israeli army showed no signs of letting up. Before each march, the platoon medic checks the conditions the soldiers are going to encounter. When soldiers are on the march, they have to drink between five to six liters. Six hours before the march, and every hour after, the soldiers drink one liter of water. Strict water drinking

regulations were implemented by the Israeli army in 1959. Since then, dehydration virtually disappeared. Tens of thousands of Egyptians died in the Sinai because of their lack of water supplies. By June 9th, the Egyptians had been driven back across the Suez Canal. Israel had captured Jerusalem and the west bank from Jordan after two days of fighting; yet the Israeli and the Syrian armies have still not engaged. The war then moved to Israel's northeast border with Syria, the Golan Heights. This mountainous area was vitally important because it gave Syria a nearly impenetrable defensive position. To have any chance of success against the Syrians, the Israelis needed to concentrate all their available forces. This was possible due to the fact that the Israelis had already finished with both the Egyptian and the Jordanian fronts, so they could divert all their power to the Syrian front.

By June 10th, Israel had taken the Golan Heights. Much of that success came down to the Israelis' ability to hit concealed Syrian artillery positions with the help of an Israeli spy Eli Cohen. Cohen was working undercover in Syria for Mossad, the Israeli Secret Service. His upbringing in Egypt helped maintain his cover. One way in which Eli Cohen's tactics helped the Israelis overcome the Syrians was his advice to the Syrian high command. Cohen recommended that in order to protect their men from sunburn and heat casualties, they should plant trees by every artillery emplacement. When the Israelis see these trees, they know the exact location of every Syrian artillery emplacement. In January 1965, Cohen was caught sending a coded transmission from his home in Damascus. In May 1965, the Cohen family watched in horror as Eli's execution was broadcasted live on television.

Another advantage the Israelis had over the Syrians was their military weapons. One of the most difficult objectives was the Syrians' Tel Fahir bunker, trenches filled with heavily armed Syrian soldiers determined to hold out. The Israelis invented their own weapon, the Uzi 5 mm, their own version of the submachine gun. After comparing the Uzi 5 mm with the AK 47, the results were that, in close quarters, the Uzi was easier to hold, quicker to reload, had better aim. By June 10th, with the help of the Uzi 5 mm, the Syrians were driven from their bunkers in the Golan Heights, and were retreating to Damascus. The Six-Day war was over.

June 5 through June 10, 1967 marked the Six-Day war, but the aftermath still resonate, unresolved, to the present day. Israel ended up gaining a lot of territory as a result of its airpower and military strength. From Egypt, Israel gained the Sinai Desert; from Syria, Israel took the Golan Heights; and from Jordan, Israel took Jerusalem and the West Bank. Israel never developed a plan to return the territory: instead, Israel began a campaign to settle the Golan Heights, Gaza, and the West Bank. In 1979, Israel gave Sinai back to Egypt as part of a peace process. Because of Egypt's willingness to deal with Israel, Egypt's membership in the Arab League was suspended and its relations with Arab neighbors suffered greatly.

In the early 1970's, the PLO had been kicked out of the Jordan; and following the 1982 war with Israel, the PLO was forced to leave Lebanon. Growing Palestinian frustration boiled over into the First Intifada in the 1990's (Palestinian uprising against the Israeli occupation of the Palestinian Territories, including strikes, boycotts on Israeli products, refusal to pay taxes, graffiti, and stone-throwing from Palestinian youths), and then in the

Second Intifada in the 2000's (a period of intensified Palestinian-Israeli violence). In response to the terrorism, Israel participated in the Oslo peace process, built a security wall between the West Bank and Israel, and created checkpoints and travel restrictions on Palestinians. Some Israelis accepted the concept of a two-state solution; however, the Islamist Hamas rose to power and opposed any peace with Israel. Many Palestinians and Israelis envision peace and feel that the answer to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is to have two secure and viable states, and to share Jerusalem (RealClearPolitics).