

The cause of the six day war



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The immediate causes of war can be traced back to Soviet plotting. A large parade was planned for Israel Independence Day, but after some controversy, heavy weapons were not permitted in the capital. The Soviets took advantage of the situation and claimed that the reason was because Israel was amassing its army on the northern border with Syria. This information was quickly passed to the Egyptian president who declared a state of emergency and sent troops to the Sinai Peninsula. The claims were debunked but ignored and Egypt continues the troop buildup. In response Israel sent troops and tank companies to the southern border. On the morning of the May 16, the number of Egyptian and Palestinian troops in the Sinai had tripled overnight. Egyptian planes began a reconnaissance of the nuclear reactor in Dimona on May 17 prompting Israel to call up 18, 000 reservists. War seemed imminent on May 18 as the Egyptian General in charge of the Sinai forces stated on Cairo radio “ The Egyptian forces have taken up positions in accordance with our predetermined plans. The morale of our armed forces is very high; for this is the day they have so long been waiting for, for this holy war” (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America). By May 20 more than 80, 000 Israeli reservists had been called up to active duty.

On May 22 Egypt committed an act of war by blocking Israeli shipping through the Strait of Tiran. Israel made several attempts at diplomacy for the rest of the month and appealed to the U. S. for support. The U. S. rejected a preemptive strike but offered aid in returning access to the Strait of Tiran. By the end of the month the surrounding Arab nations had made several alliances and defense pacts, Israel now surrounded by “ 500, 000 troops,

more than 5, 000 tanks, and almost 1, 000 fighter planes” (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America). Israel received word that the U. S. could support a preemptive strike and the newly appointed defense minister, Moshe Dayan finalized the war plan. On June 4, the Israeli cabinet learned that France had issued an arms embargo on the region and once again the U. S. no longer supported a preemptive strike and also issued an arms embargo. The U. S. State department announced that “ Our position is neutral in thought, word and deed” (Bard, The 1967 Six-Day War). Never the less, the cabinet voted 12-2 for a preemptive strike that would begin the following morning.

WAR

The Israelis faced a war on three battlefronts, the borders with Egypt, Jordan and Syria. On the Egyptian front the Israelis attacked with unexpected force. The attack was two-phased, phase one was a simultaneous air and ground attack designed to break into the country. Phase two was designed to exploit the success of phase one and attack the remaining forces in the Sinai. Phase one was a complete success, Israel attacked with 90% of its Air Force inventory, more than double what Egypt expected. Additionally the air attack began not at dawn as expected but strategically at 0745 when most of the Egyptian leadership was out of contact in traffic. The air attack first concentrated on disabling the enemy runways then concentrating on bombers and MiG fighter jets before expanding the attack to include all aircraft types and strategic missile and radar locations. The ground attack was a threefold attack coming from the north, east and west. The battles were fought the night before and the morning of June 6 and by mid-day all

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the Israeli targets were captured. Israel had successfully broken through Egyptian defenses in central Sinai and severely damaged the rest of Egypt's defenses.

Phase two's purpose was to exploit the success of phase one but due to the rapid success of phase one many Egyptian citizens and even soldiers did not know the gravity of the situation. The Egyptian military chief, Marshal Amer was well aware of the disaster and was unable to maintain control. He began sending contradicting orders to the battlefield before he ordered a complete retreat. After a mere 96 hours the war in the Sinai was over (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America).

On the Jordanian front, Jordan had placed approximately 45, 000 troops within the West Bank on 10 of 11 bridges into Israel. The morning of June 5 Jordan began an air attack on Israel and Jordan received false intelligence that Egypt had crippled 75 percent of the Israeli Air Force and began an invasion of Israel. Israel did not immediately respond but by mid-day it was clear that a war with Jordan could not be avoided and they began a counterattack. Israel began by recovering land lost that morning during the initial Jordanian attack and then began moving toward Jerusalem. At the end of the first day of fighting the Israel air and ground forces were successful in isolating Jerusalem. The next day Israel continued their assault on Jerusalem and by the morning of June 7 Israel took the last objective of the Temple Mount, the holiest site in Judaism. Israel continued into the West Bank and by that evening both sides agreed to a UN cease fire, ending the fighting and leaving Israel total control of Jerusalem and the West Bank.

On the Syrian front, Syria had received false soviet intelligence claiming that Israel was preparing for an offensive. In response to the warning, Syria activated its mutual defense pact with Egypt and began deploying its troops along its 40 miles of border between Israel. On the first day of the war, Syria began air attacks on northern communities and attempted a strike on the Haifa oil refineries. The Israeli Air Force responded by attacking Syrian airbases. The next day Syria increased their attacks and sent two companies across the border. The attacking Syrians were held off by local defenses until the Israeli Air Force responded and pushed them back over the border. By the fourth day of the war on June 8, Syria accepted a UN cease fire but after only five hours they disregarded the cease fire. With a majority of Israeli forces currently in the Sinai and the West Bank, Israel had only taken defensive positions and had not begun an offensive with Syria. This gave Syria the false sense of security in their positions on the Golan Heights. After achieving victory in the Sinai, Israeli resources could turn their attention to the north. On June 9 the Israeli Air Force began bombing the Golan Heights. By mid-day Israeli ground forces had crossed into Syrian territory. By the next morning, Israeli forces were approximately 10 km out of Quneitra and Damascus radio announced the fall of the city hoping to enlist the aid of the Soviets. However, the tactic backfired and Syrian soldiers in the Golan panicked and fled. By nightfall the fighting in the Golan Heights ended and the Six-Day war was over.

IMMEDIATE EFFECTS

Immediately after the war the Arab nations continued to reject Zionism and vowed to continue to oppose Israel, they demanded no peace deals and no

negotiations with Israel. On June 9 U. S. President Johnson offered his five principles for peace in the region. Despite the opposition from the other nations in the region, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol agrees to use the five principles for future negotiations.

Five months later the United Nations Security Council delivered Resolution 242. The resolution was carefully worded to act as a guide for negotiating peace. Shortly after the resolution was passed, Jordan and Israel recognized the resolution. Later Egypt also recognized their own interpretation of it, and continued to state that they would not negotiate with or recognize Israel. Syria refused to accept the resolution and declared it was only “ another form of occupation” (Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America).

LONG TERM EFFECTS

One of the biggest long term effects of the Six-Day War was the number of Arab refugees from the West Bank. Jordan’s decision to attack Israel caused many Arabs to flee the West Bank into the East Bank in Jordan. When Israel gained the West Bank many Arabs that fled were now homeless. Eventually most of the refugees were allowed to return and prospered due to increased economic growth. After the war Israel began to invest in the infrastructure of the West Bank and created policies that allowed Arabs to move freely over the border. Despite the economic prosperity in the region that lasted more than two decades, Palestinian leadership continued violent attacks that had led to increased Israeli security measures. Israel did eventually return the Sinai to Egypt, giving up many developed towns, strategic military positions

and oil fields (Bard, Israel Makes Peace with Egypt). In return for returning the Sinai, Israel and Egypt signed a peace treaty that has been able to maintain peace for the last two decades. Despite progress with Egypt the other surrounding Arab nations continue hostilities with Israel, with the latest conflict beginning in 2008 along the Israeli-Lebanese border.