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## **The Six-Day War of 1967: Build-Up to War**

**By Dr. Jonathan Spyer\***

### **BUILD-UP TO WAR**

- In the period preceding the war, Egyptian President Gamal Abd al-Nasser was explicit concerning his ambition to destroy Israel. For example:
  - In an address to the UN General Assembly, September 1960: ‘The only solution to Palestine is that matters should return to the condition prevailing before the error was committed [i.e. the annulment of Israel's existence]’
  - In a speech given in March 1965: ‘We shall not enter Palestine with its oil covered in sand. We shall enter it with its soil saturated with blood.’
- Tension began in 1966, on the Israeli-Syrian border. The Ba'athist regime of Salah Jadid armed and trained the Palestinian Fatah movement, and permitted its members to conduct raids across the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the Golan Heights against Israeli communities in the Galilee.
  - Fatah raids, in cooperation with Syrian regular forces, increased throughout 1966-7. In the 18 months preceding the war, 120 attacks took place, resulting in 11 fatalities.
- April 7, 1967: An air battle between Israeli and Syria further increased tension on the border. Syrians then introduced heavy artillery into the DMZ.
- April 1967: Soviet Ambassador to Israel, Leonid Chuvakhin, complained of ‘heavy concentration of Israeli forces on the Syrian border.’ No such concentration was taking place. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol invited Chuvakhin to tour the border and see for himself.
- May 15: President Nasser, in gesture of support for Syrians, ordered two armoured divisions into the Sinai Peninsula. Israel, in turn, dispatched an armoured brigade toward the Gaza Strip. Israel assured Washington and Moscow of the defensive nature of its activities.

- May 17: Nasser ordered UNEF, the UN force in the Sinai, to depart from Egyptian territory. Under the order of the UN Secretary General U Thant, they complied. Three Egyptian divisions and 600 tanks then deployed in the Sinai.
- Israeli PM Eshkol gave a speech to the Knesset: ‘I wish to repeat to the Arab countries, especially to Egypt and Syria, that we do not contemplate any military action. We have contemplated no intervention in their internal affairs. We ask only from these states the application of these same principles toward us as an act of reciprocity.’
- May 22: Nasser announces the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, cutting off all shipping to Israel’s port of Eilat.
  - This represented a mortal threat to Israel. The port of Eilat was responsible for 30% of Israel’s mineral exports - accommodating a million tons of cargo in 1966.
  - Nasser's move was also illegal. As part of the post-1956 war settlement, the Gulf of Aqaba had been declared by maritime nations in 1957 as an international waterway.
- May 23: General mobilization in Israel.
- May 25: Nasser, in speech to Egyptian National Assembly: ‘The problem presently before the Arab countries is not whether the port of Eilat should be blockaded or how to blockade it - but how to totally exterminate the State of Israel for all time.’
- May 27: An Egyptian plan to attack Israel, *Operation Fajr*, is detected by Israel and stopped by US and Soviet intervention only a few hours before it was to be launched. (Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims*, p. 307.)
- May 30: Mutual defence pact agreed between Egypt, Jordan and Syria.
- June 2: US President Johnson informs PM Eshkol that no international force to compel Egyptian compliance with international law would be formed.
- June 3: Iraq joins Arab military pact.
- June 3-4. Israeli Cabinet decides on pre-emptive strike.

## THE WAR

- June 5: 7:46am, Egypt's air force destroyed by IAF attack.
- June 5: Jordan enters the war - capturing Hill of Evil Counsel in Jerusalem and shelling Mt. Scopus.
- June 5-8. Syrian artillery bombards Israeli positions from the Golan Heights.
- June 7: Sharm al-Sheikh, Egyptian coastal fortress overlooking straits of Tiran, falls to Israeli forces.
- June 7: Jordanians defeated in the West Bank. Israeli forces capture Old City of Jerusalem.
- June 8: IDF reaches the Suez Canal, completing the victory over Egypt. Sinai Peninsula and Gaza Strip captured. Egypt and Jordan accept ceasefire. Israeli Cabinet votes to launch assault on Golan Heights.
- June 9: Israeli forces engage with Syrians on Golan Heights. June 10: 6:30 pm, the war ends with a ceasefire following the Israeli conquest of the Golan Heights.
- Israeli casualties: 679 dead, 2,563 wounded. Arab casualties: 21,000 dead, 45,000 wounded
- For the third time since its declaration of independence in 1948, Israel successfully frustrated an Arab attempt to destroy it.

## THE AFTERMATH

- November 22: UN Security Council unanimously accepts Resolution 242, formulated by Lord Caradon, the UK's delegate to the UN.
  - The resolution established the principle of 'Land for Peace.' It called for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. This would be achieved through the 'acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every state in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries,' and through the 'withdrawal of Israeli forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict.'

- August 29-September 1, 1969: Arab League declaration in Khartoum confirms rejection of possibility of terms with Israel. The Declaration advocates ‘no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiations with Israel.’

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