

Interviews and Presentations

## Consequences of the 1967 War

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It has been said that the world is still living the seventh day of the Six Day War. David Makovsky offered this look back at the consequential conflict at a 2004 State Department conference.

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It has been said that the world is still living the seventh day of the Six Day war. Indeed, all events that have occurred subsequently in the Arab-Israel arena can be seen as a reaction to that conflict. There have been many onsequences of this war. I would like to focus on just a few of them in the Arab-Israeli arena.

### I. General Consequences

#### Peace-Making: 242

The first is the foundation of US diplomacy in Arab-Israeli affairs, as enshrined in UN Security Council Resolution 242. This resolution at least implied the trading of territory for peace and no longer focusing on armistice agreements. This agreement would be key to future Israeli-Arab agreements. Such was the case with the Sinai desert, won by Israel in 1967, which was the territorial asset that Israel traded for a peace treaty with Egypt, just a little more than a decade later. In the immediate aftermath of the war, however, Resolution 242 didn't have as many takers. The Israeli cabinet on June 19th came up with a blueprint for trading most of their gains on the battlefield for peace, but tragically, it was met with the three 'no's of the Arab summit in Khartoum. A 'plastic moment' in history was missed. Subsequently, there would be missed opportunities on both sides. Yet, one must wonder how the Middle East would have been different if the offer of a Beirut initiative in 2002 could have come about 35 years earlier when Moshe Dayan said he was waiting for the proverbial phone to ring.

#### The Arab Political System

The Arab political system also experienced the consequences of the war. For the Arab world, the defeat of 1967 was the open wound from which the Arab world never recovered, as Dr. Khatib suggested. The Arab political system would be even further ossified, amid a lack of self-criticism by the Arab leaders. The result was that Pan-Arab nationalism and Nasserism would over time be eclipsed by an incipient Islamism that became a threat to the Arab order. Islamists were exiled under Nasser, and within several years would ultimately be allowed to return as a counterweight to the Nasserists. The Islamists had their interpretation of the Arab defeat that the loss was divine punishment due to a lack of Muslim faith, but an Arab liberal critique of that war would not be forthcoming. It has started to occur now. If it had existed, it would have looked at how unelected leaders would view conflict with Israel as an instrument of domestic legitimacy. As Dr. Khatib wrote in his paper, the impact of the war in the Arab world "stifled questioning and political reforms and strengthened dictatorships. The new dictators' performance proved to be more disastrous than the old leadership they were supposed to reform. They took championing the Palestinians as the cause and liberation of Jerusalem as its fig leaf."

### II. Consequences for the Regional Players

Beyond the general consequences, the war had specific consequences for the regional players.

#### The Palestinians

For the first time since 1948, those Palestinians living in what they regarded as historic Palestine would be reunited, albeit under Israeli control. In general, the tragedy of both Palestinians and Israelis would continue. As Kristin Tassin has already pointed out, the war was a defining moment in the resurgence of Palestinian nationalism. This resurgent nationalism was designed in no small part to extricate this issue from the control of Arab states. Fateh would wrest control of the PLO from Ahmed Shukayri after the war, underlining Palestinian disillusionment with the performance of the Arab states during the 1967 war.

Ms. Tassin says that between 1948 and 1967, the Palestinians had submerged their nationalism amid general Arab nationalism, as war was "the practical means to the achievement of their shared goal of the liberation of their

country." This is true, but is also a euphemism. It means that Arab nationalism was an instrument that each hoped for to eliminate the existence of Israel.

## **Jordan, Syria and Lebanon**

Despite their efforts to run their own affairs, certain Arab states sought to control Palestinian nationalism from afar, opposing an independent national Palestinian movement, especially Hafez Assad in Syria. King Hussein of Jordan would view it as a direct threat to his rule.

Ms. Tassin points out that Palestinian armed conflict had a destabilizing impact, presumably on Jordan and Syria. She does not go into details, but she must be referring to the upheaval in Jordan in 1970 and the civil war in Lebanon beginning in 1975 and lasting through 1990. It seems that what was at work was something beyond Palestinian nationalism. Because of the defeat of 1967, the Palestinians actually thought they were incipient leaders of an Arab revolution. It was a disastrous temptation, producing the debacles in Jordan and Lebanon.

Furthermore, the specific actions of both Syria and Jordan during the war had corresponding consequences. Jordanian and Syrian shelling of Israeli civilian areas triggered Israel's seizure of lands from these countries. Motives for involvement may vary, such as King Hussein believing he had no choice in terms of domestic and inter-Arab politics, but the result was the same. By losing the West Bank, Jordan was forced to take a stance to protect its national integrity. Israel and Jordanian officials continually sought each other out over the next three decades to ensure that a radicalizing Palestinian national identity would not impinge upon the stability of Jordan and Israel. For its part, Syria used the 1967 and 1973 wars to advance its closeness to Moscow, both militarily and economically. As Mr. Foley suggests, Lebanon's sitting out in 1967 contributed to the welcoming of the Palestinians into Lebanon shortly thereafter.

## **Egypt**

Beyond these consequences for individual Arab states, the 1967 War changed the status quo in the Arab regional order: it shattered the Egyptian grip over the Arab world. In some ways, Egypt was the last to enter pan-Arabism and the first to exit it. No other modern Arab state has achieved the dominance in the Arab world that Egypt did in the 50's and 60's.

## **III. Consequences for Israel**

### **US-Israel relations**

The 1967 war obviously had consequences for Israel, as well. US-Israel relations deepened in the wake of the war, as Hisham Khatib points out. This is due to a combination of factors, including the fact that Israel would become a regional power as a result of the war, and that American Jews, electrified by Israel's victory, would view US support for Israel as an organizing principle.

### **International Community and Israel**

Moreover, for Israel, the 1967 War deepened its suspicion of international guarantees, amid perceptions of shifting interests of the parties. Israelis would be upset that the Eisenhower Administration's 1957 guarantee of free access to the Straits of Tiran, supported by other countries such as France, would not be honored. While there may be debate as to whether the US did indeed violate the letter of the Eisenhower Administration's pledge, in the eyes of Israelis, the result was that the US did not enforce the idea of free passage when Nasser expelled UNEF, the UN peacekeeping force. Preoccupied by Vietnam, the US was in no mood to force open the Straits, much to Israel's chagrin about the value of such guarantees. This would be a reminder of Israel's overall isolation, as the US-Israel relationship at the time was not as strong as it is today.

The war also highlighted the fact that France's interests had also changed. France after Algeria was different than the France of the 1950's, when its relationship with Israel was closer. When Abba Eban reminded DeGaulle about its endorsement of the US guarantee on the eve of the Six Day War, DeGaulle said, "that was 1957," adding, "this is 1967." In short, he admitted to endorsing the commitment but declared he would not abide by it. When he UNEF left the Sinai and the war began, Eban would say at the UN that the unimpeded move by UNEF would be the equivalent of "an umbrella that is taken away as soon as it begins to rain." Taken together, Israel's deepening suspicion of international guarantees will undoubtedly color Israel's attitude about other international guarantees, amid renewed discussion today in some quarters about sending international forces to be interposed between combatants.

### **Domestic Israeli Consequences**

For Israel, there would be societal fallout, as well. The War of 1967 saw the end of the religious as a moderating force in Israeli politics. It was the National Religious Party in Israel that was one of the last holdouts on when it came to going to war in 1967. The war shattered this mindset. A new generation of religious leaders would emerge that would spurn the cosmopolitan erudition of old leaders, and instead embrace a religious messianism that would be sparked as Israel would be reunited with biblical patrimony. Victory was explained as a miracle, demonstrating the interventionist, divine hand in history.

For Israel's generals, there were two interesting consequences. First, the war marked the transition from mortal vulnerability to the hubris of invincibility. Before the 1967 war, all Israeli cities were in Arab artillery range. After the war, all neighboring Arab cities were in Israel's artillery range. These generals did not believe that Egypt would start a war in 1973, and the net result was that Israel would be caught off guard at the war's start. On a political level, it would mark the rise of Yitzhak Rabin who was the victorious general of the 1967 War. Seven years later, he would be prime minister of Israel, a position that he attained with only middling success, only to return to the post many years later, where he signed the Oslo accord.

## **IV. Consequences for the Superpowers**

For the US, the war and its immediate aftermath would mark the emergence of the US as the pre-eminent peacemaker in the Middle East. The Soviets could provide materials for war, but only the US could exert the influence for peace. Within a few years after the war, a new Arab leader named Anwar Sadat would expel Soviet advisors from Egypt, and Cairo would seek a back-channel with Washington in order to assess the prospects for diplomacy. This transition to a US-centric approach would be solidified after the 1973 War.

## **V. Final Remarks and Reactions**

Finally, in response to some of the remarks of my fellow panelists, I offer a few notes.

First, it is important to remember that Arab enmity toward Israel predated the 1967 War, so the outcome cannot be solely blamed for the enmity that would follow. Israel could not impose peace and its Arab antagonists could not impose a military victory. Israeli control of the West Bank witnessed an upsurge in terror and human hardship on all sides, including the misery of occupation. If victory brought peril, there is little doubt what defeat would have wrought. If Israel would have lost the 1967 war, its existence would likely be imperiled, and certainly the subsequent diplomatic consequences that would have ensued would have been very grave.

Second, in general, contrary to Mr. Khatib's assertion, everything we know about the run up to the war suggests that Eshkol sought to avoid conflict with Jordan. As Tom Segev cites Eban's autobiography. "I have never had reason to regret the effort that Eshkol and I made to prevent war with Jordan."

Third, I would like to make one final observation about something Mr. Khatib said. He said Israel sought an Egyptian provocation in order to launch the 1967 War while at different parts of his paper, he observes, "this war demonstrated the historical crucial role single statesman play in crisis management and war avoidance." He continued, asserting that "Had a strong UN Secretary General existed and played his role, had decision making in the Egyptian leadership not been so confused, this war could have been avoided to the relief and benefit of nearly everyone."

Every single declassified Israeli document -- and Israel's declassification policy is no less liberal than that of the US -- shows that war with Egypt was the last thing that Israel wanted. Moreover, to suggest that Egypt's closing the Straits of Tiran to Israel was a "minor infraction" seems very misplaced, given the commitment made after Suez and critically that Israel relied on the Straits for its lifeblood, almost its oil supplies.

To suggest that Israel was looking to pick a fight with Egypt is not only not supported by the facts, but it ignores the sense of existential dread that overtook Israeli society at the time. Notwithstanding Meir Amit's private upbeat assessment Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara before the outbreak of the war, Prime Minister's Eshkol's generals were telling him that the prime minister's hesitation meant he was playing with Israel's very existence. In the run-up to the war, the government dug 14,000 mass graves in Tel Aviv Yarkon Park. Israel was so isolated before the 1967 war that it could not even get the US to make a public endorsement for the right of self-defense for a country at its population and industrial center had a geographic width equal to the length of Manhattan, while Egypt was reaching military pacts with Jordan and Syria, and was reaching understandings for auxiliary assistance from other Arab states. This was a regional context. Arab leaders, whose countries went to war the day Israel was born, routinely made public declarations for Israel's destruction. This was the context for the dread on the societal level.

Fourth and finally, regarding Ms. Tassin's appraisal of Palestinians actions in the 1970s, it may also be worth asking if whatever the headlines value in the international media, such operations, such as hijacking airlines and massacres of Israeli civilians in Maalot, Kiryat Shmona and Coastal Road, and later to be followed by Hamas and Islamic Jihad postponed, rather than hastened the prospect of a two state solution for the good of both peoples. I think it is clear that the former was the case.

Taken together, it is indeed hard to recall whether any other short war in modern history had such profound regional and international consequences. Indeed, we are still living the seventh day of the Six-Day War.