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Rethinking the Six-Day War

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The Begin-Sadat (BESA) Center for Strategic Studies

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Rethinking the Six-Day War

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The Inevitable Conflict

Efraim Karsh

It has long been conventional wisdom to view the June 1967 war as an accidental conflagration that neither Arabs nor Israelis desired, yet none were able to prevent. Had Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser not fallen for a false Soviet warning of Israeli troop concentrations along the Syrian border and deployed his forces in the Sinai Peninsula, the standard narrative runs, the slippery slope to war would have been averted altogether; had Israel not misconstrued the Egyptian grandstanding for a mortal threat to its national security, if not its very survival, it would have foregone the preemptive strike that started the war. In short, it was a largely accidental and unnecessary war born of mutual miscalculations and misunderstandings.[1]

This view could not be further from the truth. If wars are much like road accidents, as the British historian A.J.P. Taylor famously quipped, having a general cause and particular causes at the same time, then the June 1967 war was anything but accidental. Its specific timing resulted of course from the convergence of a number of particular causes at a particular juncture. But its general cause – the total Arab rejection of Jewish statehood, starkly demonstrated by the concerted attempt to

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destroy the state of Israel at birth and the unwavering determination to rectify this "unfinished business" – made another all-out Arab-Israeli war a foregone conclusion.

Pan-Arabism's Politics of Violence

No sooner had the doctrine of pan-Arabism, postulating the existence of "a single nation bound by the common ties of language, religion and history…. behind the facade of a multiplicity of sovereign states"[2] come to dominate inter-Arab politics at the end of World War I than anti-Zionism became its most effective rallying cry: not from concern for the wellbeing of the Palestinian Arabs but from the desire to fend off a supposed foreign encroachment on the perceived pan-Arab patrimony. As Abdel Rahman Azzam, secretary-general of the Arab League, told Zionist officials in September 1947:

> For me, you may be a fact, but for [the Arab masses], you are not a fact at all – you are a temporary phenomenon. Centuries ago, the Crusaders established themselves in our midst against our will, and in 200 years, we ejected them. This was because we never made the mistake of accepting them as a fact.[3]

On rare occasions, this outright rejectionism was manifested in quiet attempts to persuade the Zionist leaders to forego their quest for statehood and acquiesce in subject status within a regional pan-Arab empire. Nuri Said, a long-time Iraqi prime minister, made this suggestion at a 1936 meeting with Chaim Weizmann while Transjordan's King Abdullah of the Hashemite family secretly extended an offer to Golda Meir (in November 1947 and May 1948) to incorporate Palestine's Jewish community into the "Greater Syrian" empire he was striving to create at the time.[4] For most of the time, however, the Arabs' primary instrument for opposing Jewish national aspirations was violence, and what determined their politics and diplomacy was the relative success or failure of that instrument in any given period. As early as April 1920, pan-Arab nationalists sought to rally support for incorporating Palestine into the short-lived Syrian kingdom headed by Abdullah's brother, Faisal, by carrying out a pogrom in Jerusalem in which five Jews were murdered and 211 wounded. The following year, Arab riots claimed a

far higher toll: some 90 dead and hundreds wounded. In the summer of 1929, another wave of violence resulted in the death of 133 Jews and the wounding of hundreds more.

For quite some time, this violent approach seemed to work. It was especially effective in influencing the British, who had been appointed the mandatory power in Palestine by the League of Nations. Though their explicit purpose was to facilitate the establishment of a Jewish national home in Palestine, the British authorities repeatedly gave in to Arab violence aimed at averting that purpose and to the demands that followed upon it. In two White Papers, issued in 1922 and 1930 respectively, London severely compromised the prospective Jewish national home by imposing harsh restrictions on immigration and land sales to Jews.

In July 1937, Arab violence reaped its greatest reward when a British commission of inquiry, headed by Lord Peel, recommended repudiating the terms of the mandate altogether in favor of partitioning Palestine into two states: a large Arab state, united with Transjordan, that would occupy some 90 percent of the mandate territory, and a Jewish state in what was left.[5] This was followed in May 1939 by another White Paper that imposed even more draconian restrictions on Jewish immigration and land purchases, closing the door to Palestine for Jews desperate to flee Nazi Europe and threatening the survival of the Jewish national project.[6] Agitating for more, the Arabs dismissed both plans as insufficient.

They did the same in November 1947 when, in the face of the imminent expiration of the British mandate, the UN General Assembly voted to partition Palestine. Rejecting this solution, the Arab nations resolved instead to destroy the state of Israel at birth and gain the whole for themselves. This time, however, Arab violence backfired spectacularly. In the 1948-49 war, not only did Israel confirm its sovereign independence and assert control over somewhat wider territories than those assigned to it by the UN partition resolution, but the Palestinian Arab community was profoundly shattered with about half of its population fleeing to other parts of Palestine and to neighboring Arab states.

Preparing for the "Second Round"

For the next two decades, inter-Arab politics would be driven by the determination to undo the consequences of the 1948 defeat, duly dubbed "al-Nakba," the catastrophe, and to bring about Israel's demise. Only now, it was Cairo rather than the two Hashemite kings that spearheaded the pan-Arab campaign following Nasser's rise to power in 1954 and his embarkation on an aggressive pan-Arab policy.

The Egyptian president had nothing but contempt for most members of the "Arab Nation" he sought to unify: "Iraqis are savage, the Lebanese venal and morally degenerate, the Saudis dirty, the Yemenis hopelessly backward and stupid, and the Syrians irresponsible, unreliable and treacherous," he told one of his confidants.[7] Neither did he have a genuine interest in the Palestinian problem – pan-Arabism's most celebrated cause: "The Palestinians are useful to the Arab states as they are," he told a Western journalist in 1956. "We will always see that they do not become too powerful. Can you imagine yet another nation on the shores of the eastern Mediterranean!"[8] Yet having recognized the immense value of this cause for his grandiose ambitions, he endorsed it with a vengeance, especially after the early 1960s when his pan-Arab dreams were in tatters as Syria acrimoniously seceded from its bilateral union with Egypt (1958-61) and the Egyptian army bogged down in an unwinnable civil war in Yemen. "Arab unity or the unity of the Arab action or the unity of the Arab goal is our way to the restoration of Palestine and the restoration of the rights of the people of Palestine," Nasser argued. "Our path to Palestine will not be covered with a red carpet or with yellow sand. Our path to Palestine will be covered with blood."[9]

By way of transforming this militant rhetoric into concrete plans, in January 1964, the Egyptian president convened the first all-Arab summit in Cairo to discuss ways and means to confront the "Israeli threat." A prominent item on the agenda was the adoption of a joint strategy to prevent Israel from using the Jordan River waters to irrigate the barren Negev desert in the south of the country. A no less important decision was to "lay the proper foundations for organizing the Palestinian people and enabling it to fulfill its role in the liberation of its homeland and its self-determination." Four months later, a gathering of 422 Palestinian activists in East Jerusalem, then

under Jordanian rule, established the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and approved its two founding documents: the organization's basic constitution and the Palestinian National Covenant.[10]

These events made Nasser yet again the undisputed leader of the Arab world, the only person capable of making the Arabs transcend, however temporarily, their self-serving interests for the sake of the collective good. He was nowhere near his cherished goal of promoting the actual unification of the Arab world under his leadership as he had seemingly been in 1958 when Syria agreed to merge with Egypt. Yet he had successfully hijacked pan-Arabism's most celebrated cause and established a working relationship with his erstwhile enemies in Amman and Riyadh. In a second summit meeting in Alexandria in October 1964, the heads of the Arab states accepted Nasser's long-term, anti-Israel strategy. This envisaged the laying of the groundwork for the decisive confrontation through the patient buildup of Arab might in all areas – military, economic, social, and political – and the simultaneous weakening of Israel through concrete actions such as the diversion of the Jordan River estuaries. The PLO was authorized to create an army of Palestinian volunteers, to which the Arab governments pledged to give support, and a special fund was established for the reorganization of the Lebanese, Syrian, and Jordanian armies under a united Arab command.

The Slide to War

Before long, this organized pan-Arab drive for Israel's destruction was disrupted by an unexpected sequence of events that led, within a few weeks, to the third Arab-Israeli war since 1948; and the event that triggered this escalation was a Soviet warning (in early May 1967) of large-scale Israeli troop concentrations along the border with Syria aimed at launching an immediate attack.[11] As pan-Arabism's standard-bearer, Nasser had no choice but to come to the rescue of a (supposedly) threatened ally tied to Egypt in a bilateral defense treaty since November 1966, especially when the pro-Western regimes in Jordan and Saudi Arabia were openly ridiculing his failure to live up to his high pan-Arab rhetoric. On May 14, the Egyptian armed forces were placed on the highest alert, and two armored divisions began moving into the Sinai Peninsula, formally demilitarized since the 1956 Suez war. That same

day, the Egyptian chief of staff, Lt.-Gen. Muhammad Fawzi, arrived in Damascus to get a first-hand impression of the military situation and to coordinate a joint response in the event of an Israeli attack. To his surprise, Fawzi found no trace of Israeli concentrations along the Syrian border or troop movements in northern Israel. He reported these findings to his superiors, but this had no impact on the Egyptian move into Sinai, which continued apace. Fawzi was to recall in his memoirs,

> From that point onward, I began to believe that the issue of Israeli concentrations along the Syrian border was not … the only or the main cause of the military deployments which Egypt was undertaking with such haste.[12]

Within less than twenty-four hours, Nasser's objective had been transformed from the deterrence of an Israeli attack against Syria into an outright challenge to the status quo established after the 1956 war. With Fawzi's reassuring findings corroborated both by Egyptian military intelligence and by a special UN inspection,[13] and the Israelis going out of their way to reassure the Soviets that they had not deployed militarily along their northern border,[14] Nasser must have realized that there was no imminent threat to Syria. He could have halted his troops at that point and claimed a political victory, having deterred an (alleged) Israeli attack against Syria.

But it is precisely here that the Arab-Israeli conflict's general cause – rejection of Israel's very existence – combined with the particular causes to make war inevitable as Nasser's resolute move catapulted him yet again to a position of regional preeminence that he was loath to relinquish. At a stroke, he had managed to undo one of Israel's foremost gains in the 1956 war – the de facto demilitarization of the Sinai Peninsula – without drawing a serious response from Jerusalem. Now that the Egyptian troops were massing in Sinai, Nasser decided to raise the ante and eliminate another humiliating remnant of that war for which he had repeatedly been castigated by his rivals in the Arab world: the presence of a UN Emergency Force (UNEF) on Egyptian (but not on Israeli) territory as a buffer between the two states.

As the UN observers were quickly withdrawn and replaced by Egyptian forces, Nasser escalated his activities still further. Addressing Egyptian

pilots in Sinai on May 22, he announced the closure of the Strait of Tiran, at the southern mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba, to Israeli and Israel-bound shipping. "The Gulf of Aqaba constitutes our Egyptian territorial waters," he announced to the cheers of an ecstatic audience. "Under no circumstances will we allow the Israeli flag to pass through the Aqaba Gulf." The following day the Egyptian mass media broke the news to the entire world.

Did Nasser consider the possibility that his actions might lead to war? All the available evidence suggests that he did. Initially, when he briefly believed in the imminence of an Israeli attack against Syria, he could not have taken for granted that the Egyptian deployment in Sinai would have deterred such an action, in which case he would have been forced to come to Syria's defense. Moreover, the demilitarization of Sinai was seen by Israel as vital to its national security, which made its violation a legitimate casus belli. But then, Nasser was being rapidly entrapped by his imperialist ambitions. He began deploying his troops in Sinai out of fear that failure to do so would damage his pan-Arab position beyond repair. He continued to escalate his activities, knowing full well that there was no threat of an Israeli attack against Syria, because of his conviction that the continuation of the crisis boosted his pan-Arab standing.

It is true that the lack of a prompt and decisive Israeli response to the Egyptian challenge, together with the quick realization that there were no Israeli concentrations along the Syrian border, might have convinced Nasser that the risks were not so great and that war was not inevitable. Yet, when he decided to remove UNEF and to close the Strait of Tiran, Nasser undoubtedly knew that he was crossing the threshold from peace to war. "Now with our concentrations in Sinai, the chances of war are fifty-fifty," he told his cabinet on May 21, during a discussion on the possible consequences of a naval blockade. "But if we close the Strait, war will be a 100 percent certainty." "We all knew that our armaments were adequate – indeed, infinitely better than in the October 1973 War," recalled Anwar Sadat, who participated in that crucial meeting:

> When Nasser asked us our opinion, we were all agreed that the Strait should be closed – except for [Prime Minister] Sidqi Sulayman, who pleaded with Nasser to show more patience … [But] Nasser

paid no attention to Sulayman's objections. He was eager to close the Strait so as to put an end to the Arab maneuverings and maintain his great prestige within the Arab world.[15]

The die was cast. Having maneuvered himself yet again into the driver's seat of inter-Arab politics, Nasser could not climb down without risking a tremendous loss of face. He was approaching the brink with open eyes, and if there was no way out of the crisis other than war, so be it: Egypt was prepared. Daily consultations between the political and the military leaderships were held. The Egyptian forces in Sinai were assigned their operational tasks. In a widely publicized article in *al-Ahram* on May 26, the newspaper's editor-in-chief, Nasser's mouthpiece, Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, explained why war between Egypt and Israel was inevitable. A week later, at a meeting with the armed forces' supreme command, Nasser predicted an Israeli strike against Egypt within forty-eight to seventy-two hours at the latest.[16]

The coming of war is seldom a happy occasion. It is often fraught with misgivings and apprehensions. But if doubts assailed Nasser's peace of mind, he gave them no public expression. The Egyptian war preparations were carried out in a confident and ever-extravagant fashion, in front of the watching eyes of the world media. The closer Nasser came to the brink, the more aggressive he became. "The Jews have threatened war," he gloated in his May 22 speech, "We tell them: You are welcome; we are ready for war." Four days later, he took a big step forward, announcing that if hostilities were to break out, "our main objective will be the destruction of Israel." "Now that we have the situation as it was before 1956," Nasser proclaimed on another occasion, "Allah will certainly help us to restore the status quo of before 1948."[17]

Once again imperialist pan-Arab winds were blowing. "This is the real rising of the Arab nation," Nasser boasted while the few skeptics within the Egyptian leadership were being rapidly converted to belief in victory over Israel. In the representative words of Naguib Mahfouz, Egypt's foremost writer and winner of the 1988 Nobel Prize:

> When Nasser held his famous press conference, before the June 1967 war, and spoke with confident pomp, I took our victory over Israel for granted. I envisaged it as a simple journey to Tel Aviv,

of hours or days at the most, since I was convinced we were the greatest military power in the Middle East.[18]

By this time, the conflict was no longer about the presence of UN forces on Egyptian soil or freedom of navigation in the Gulf of Aqaba, let alone the alleged Israeli threat to Syria. It had been transformed into a jihad to eradicate the foremost "remnant of Western imperialism" in the Middle East. "During the crusaders' occupation, the Arabs waited seventy years before a suitable opportunity arose, and they drove away the crusaders," Nasser echoed Azzam's 1947 rhetoric, styling himself as the new Saladin: "[R]ecently we felt that we are strong enough, that if we were to enter a battle with Israel, with God's help, we could triumph."[19]

Nasser's militancy was contagious. The irritating chorus of criticism had fallen silent. His former Arab rivals were standing in line to rally behind his banner. On the morning of May 30, Jordan's King Hussein, who at the beginning of the crisis still mocked Nasser for "hiding behind UNEF's apron," arrived in Cairo where he immediately signed a defense pact with Egypt. He returned to Amman later that day accompanied by Ahmad Shuqeiri, head of the PLO and hitherto one of the king's archenemies. The following day, an Egyptian general arrived in Amman to command the eastern front in the event of war. On June 4, Iraq followed suit by entering into a defense agreement with Egypt, and Nasser informed King Hussein that their pact now included Iraq as well. By this time, Arab expeditionary forces – including an Iraqi armored division, a Saudi and a Syrian brigade, and two Egyptian commando battalions – were making their way to Jordan.[20] The balance of forces, so it seemed to the Arabs, had irreversibly shifted in their favor. The moment of reckoning with the "Zionist entity," as they pejoratively called Israel, had come. "Have your authorities considered all the factors involved and the consequences of the withdrawal of UNEF?" the commander of the UN force, Gen. Indar Jit Rikhye, asked the Egyptian officers bearing the official demand. "Oh yes sir! We have arrived at this decision after much deliberation, and we are prepared for anything. If there is war, we shall next meet at Tel Aviv." The Iraqi president Abdel Rahman Aref was no less forthright. "This is the day of the battle," he told the Iraqi forces leaving for Jordan. "We are determined and united to achieve our clear aim – to remove Israel from the map. We shall, Allah willing, meet in Tel Aviv and Haifa."[21]

The Non-Accidental War

Yet for all his militant zeal, Nasser had weighty reasons to forgo a first strike at this particular time. His war preparations had not been completed: The Egyptian forces in Sinai were still digging in; the Arab expeditionary forces to Jordan had not yet been fully deployed, and coordination of the operational plans of the Arab military coalition required more time. Nasser also feared that an Egyptian attack would trigger a US military response that might neutralize the new Arab political and military superiority over Israel, which had been gained by the most remarkable demonstration of pan-Arab unity since the 1948 war.[22]

Nasser's fears of US intervention were compounded by the nature of the Egyptian operational plan, which envisaged deep thrusts into Israel's territory. An armored division was to break out of the Gaza Strip and capture border villages inside Israel while another armored division was to cut off the southern Negev from the rest of Israel, thereby achieving the long-standing Egyptian objective of establishing a land bridge with Jordan.[23] Given Nasser's belief in the US commitment to Israel's territorial integrity, such plans could hardly be implemented if Egypt were to take the military initiative. Their execution as an act of self-defense in response to an Israeli attack was a completely different matter, however.

This explains Nasser's readiness to play the political card, such as his decision to send Vice-President Zakaria Muhieddin to Washington on June 7. He had no intention whatever to give ground, and the move was aimed at cornering Israel and making it more vulnerable to Arab pressure and, eventually, war. Robert Anderson, a special US envoy sent to Egypt to defuse the crisis, reported to President Lyndon Johnson that Nasser showed no sign of backing down and spoke confidently of the outcome of a conflict with Israel.[24]

Anderson was not the only person to have heard this upbeat assessment. Nasser's belief in Egypt's ability to absorb an Israeli strike and still win the war was widely shared by the Egyptian military and was readily expressed to the other members of the Arab military coalition. In his May 30 visit to Cairo, King Hussein was assured by Nasser of Egypt's full preparedness against an Israeli air strike: No more than 15-20 percent losses would be

incurred before the Egyptian air force dealt a devastating blow to Israel. The other members of the Jordanian delegation heard equally confident words from Abdel Hakim Amer, Nasser's deputy and commander of the Egyptian armed forces.[25] When the Egyptian foreign minister Mahmoud Riad asked Amer about the armed forces' state of readiness, he was told that "if Israel actually carried out any military action against us, I could, with only one third of our forces, reach Beersheba."[26]

The most eloquent public exposition of this euphoric state of mind was provided by Heikal's May 26 *al-Ahram* article on the inevitability of war. "Egypt has exercised its power and achieved the objectives of this stage without resorting to arms so far," he wrote:

> Israel has no alternative but to use arms if it wants to exercise power. This means that the logic of the fearful confrontation now taking place between Egypt, fortified by the might of the masses of the Arab nation, and Israel, bolstered by the illusion of American might, dictates that Egypt, after all it has now succeeded in achieving, must wait, even though it has to wait for a blow. This is necessitated also by the sound conduct of the battle, particularly from an international point of view. Let Israel begin. Let our second blow then be ready. Let it be a knockout.

As it were, the war that broke out on June 5 was not quite the knockout that Heikal had in mind. Instead of dealing Israel a mortal blow, the Egyptians saw their air force destroyed on the ground within three hours of the outbreak of hostilities and their army crushed and expelled from Sinai over the next three days. As Syria, Jordan, and Iraq attacked Israel, their armies were similarly routed. By the time the war was over, after merely six days of fighting, Israel had extended its control over vast Arab territories about five times its own size, from the Suez Canal, to the Jordan River, to the Golan Heights.

Small wonder that Nasser would doggedly shrug off responsibility for the defeat by feigning victimhood and emphatically denying any intention to attack Israel. This claim was quickly endorsed by numerous Western apologists eager to absolve him of any culpability for the war, in what was to become the standard Arab and Western historiography

of the conflict.[27] Some went so far in the attempt to exculpate Nasser as to portray him as a mindless creature thriving on hollow rhetoric and malleable in the extreme:

> ... retired members of the old Revolutionary Command Council wander in and out of meetings and give their opinions; Nasser butts in and nobody pays much attention to him; he takes journalists seriously and revises his intelligence estimate on the basis of their remarks; he is influenced by the casual conversation of diplomats.[28]

Aside from doing a great injustice to Nasser – the charismatic dictator who had heavy-handedly ruled Egypt for over a decade and mesmerized tens of millions throughout the Arabic-speaking world – this description has little basis in reality. As evidenced both by Nasser's escalatory behavior during the crisis and by captured military documents revealing elaborate plans for an invasion of Israel, the Egyptian president did not stumble into war but orchestrated it with open eyes. He steadily raised his sights in accordance with the vicissitudes in the crisis until he set them on the ultimate pan-Arab objective: the decisive defeat of Israel and, if possible, its destruction.

Conclusion

The June 1967 war was a direct corollary of pan-Arabism's delusions of grandeur, triggered by the foremost champion of this ideology and directed against its foremost nemesis. It was the second all-out attempt in a generation to abort the Jewish national revival, and it ended in an even greater ignominy than its 1948 precursor. Then, only half of Palestine had been lost. Now the land was lost in its entirety, together with Egyptian and Syrian territories. In 1948, the dividing line between victor and vanquished was often blurred as the war dragged on intermittently for over a year. In 1967, owing to the war's swift and decisive nature, there was no doubt as to which side was the victor.

The magnitude of the defeat thus punctured the pan-Arab bubble of denial and suggested to the Arabs that military force had its limits. If the 1967 war was fought with a view to destroying Israel, the next war, in October 1973, launched by Nasser's successor Anwar Sadat, had the far narrower

objective of triggering a political process that would allow Egypt to regain the territories lost in 1967. Israel's remarkable military recovery in October 1973 after having been caught off-guard further reinforced Sadat's determination to abandon pan-Arabism's most celebrated cause and culminated in the Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty of March 1979.

While one can only speculate about Sadat's ultimate intentions (he was assassinated in October 1981 by an Islamist zealot), there is little doubt that his successor, Hosni Mubarak, viewed peace not as a value in and of itself but as the price Egypt had to pay for such substantial benefits as increased US economic and military aid. So did the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), which perceived its 1990s peace agreements with Israel as a pathway not to a two-state solution – Israel alongside a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza living side-by-side in peace – but to the subversion of the state of Israel.

In Arab eyes, then, with the partial exception perhaps of Jordan's King Hussein, contractual peace with Israel has represented not a recognition of legitimacy but a tacit admission that, at least for the time being, the Jewish state cannot be defeated by force of arms. And while militant pan-Arabism is unlikely to regain its pre-1967 dominance in the foreseeable future due to the ravages of the recent Arab upheavals, the advent of a new generation of Palestinians and Arabs for whom the 1967 defeat is but a dim memory, one more historical injustice that has to be redressed by any means necessary, makes the prospects of Arab-Israeli reconciliation as remote as ever.

NOTES

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2 Walid Khalidi, "Thinking the Unthinkable: A Sovereign Palestinian State," *Foreign Affairs*, July 1978, pp. 695-6; Hisham Sharabi, *Nationalism and Revolution in the Arab World* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1966), p. 3.

3 A.S. Eban to the Executive of the Jewish Agency, "Conversation with Abdul Rahman Azzam, 15th September 1947," Sept. 29, 1947, Zionist Archives (Jerusalem), S25/9020; David Horowitz, *State in the Making* (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 231-5.

4 Norman A. Rose, ed., Baffy. *The Diaries of Blanche Dugdale, 1936-1947* (London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1973), p. 23 (June 29, 1936 entry); Chaim Weizmann to Sir Archibald Clark-Kerr, Baghdad, June 29, 1936, Chaim Weizmann to William G.A. Ormsby-Gore, London, June 28, 1936, *The Letters and Papers of Chaim Weizmann. Series A, Vol. 17, Aug. 1935-Dec. 1936* (New Brunswick and Jerusalem: Transaction Books and Israel Universities Press, 1979), pp. 290-2; Ezra Danin, "Conversation with Abdullah, 17.11.47," Zionist Archives, S25/4004; Sasson to Shertok, Nov. 20, 1947, Zionist Archives, S25/1699; Golda Meyerson's oral report to the Provisional State Council, May 12, 1948, Israel State Archives, *Provisional State Council: Protocols, 18 April-13 May 1948* (Jerusalem: Israel Government Publishing House, 1978), pp. 40-1.

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6 "Cmd. 6019: Palestine, Statement of Policy," May 1939, Her Majesty's Stationery Office, London, 1939.

7 Nejla Izzedin, *Nasser of the Arabs: An Arab Assessment* (London: Third World Centre, 1981), p. 327; Miles Copeland, *The Games of Nations* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1970), pp. 56-7.

8 John Laffin, *The PLO Connections* (London: Corgi Books, 1983), p. 127.

9 "President Gamal Abdel Nasser's Pre-Election Speeches in Asiut, Minia, Shebin el Kom, Mansura," Information Ministry, Cairo, 1965, pp. 28-9, 68.

10 Ahmad Shuqeiry, *Min al-Qimma ila-l-Hazima* (Beirut: Dar al-Awda, 1971), p. 50; Yezid Sayigh, *Armed Struggle and the Search for State: The Palestinian National Movement*, 1949-1993 (Washington, D.C. and London: Institute for Palestine Studies and Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 98.

11 Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity: An Autobiography* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), pp. 171-2; *al-Ahram* (Cairo), May 23, 1967.

12 Muhammad Fawzi, *Harb ath-Thalath Sanawat, 1967-1970* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, 1980), pp. 71-2.

13 Abdel Muhsin Kamel Murtagi, *al-Fariq Murtagi Yarwi al-Haqa'iq: Qaid Jabhat Sinai fi Harb 1967* (Cairo: Dar al-Watan al-Arabi, 1976), p. 64; Indar Jit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder* (London: Cass, 1980), pp. 11-2, 14.   On three occasions the Soviet ambassador to Israel was invited by the Israeli authorities to visit the border area but declined to go. Sydney D. Bailey, *Four Arab-Israeli Wars and the Peace Process* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 190.

15 Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 172. Sadat's version was confirmed by Zakaria Muhieddin, second vice-president in 1967, who also participated at the meeting. See Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, *1967: al-Infijar* (Cairo: al-Ahram, 1990), pp. 514-9; Richard B. Parker, "The June War: Some Mysteries Explored," *Middle East Journal*, Spring 1992, p. 192.

16 Nasser's speech on the anniversary of the Egyptian revolution, July 23, 1967, in Walter Laqueur, ed., *The Israel-Arab Reader* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1970), p. 248.

17 *The New York Times*, May 27, 30, 1967.

18 Ibid., May 27, 1967; Abdel Latif Baghdadi, *Mudhakirat* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Misri al-Hadith, 1977), vol. 2, p. 271; al-Usbu (Cairo), Jan. 24, 1976.

19 Nasser's speech to Arab trade unionists, May 26, 1967, in Laqueur, *The Israel-Arab Reader*, pp. 215-8.

20 Samir A. Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 11-2; Moshe Dayan, *Story of My Life* (London: Sphere Books, 1978), p. 314.

21 Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder*, p. 21; Baghdad radio, June 1, 1967.

22 See, for example, Nasser's speech, July 23, 1967; Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London: Allen Lane, 1971), p. 489.

23 "Milhemet Arbaat Hayamim, 1967" (an internal IDF document based inter alia on intercepted Egyptian intelligence sources), June 1967, Israel Defense Forces, Southern Command. The existence of operational plans to occupy Israeli territory was also confirmed by Egyptian military sources. See, for example, Muhammad Abdel Ghani al-Gamasy, *Mudhakirat al-Gamasy: Harb October 1973* (Paris: al-Manshurat al-Sharqiya, 1990), pp. 70-1, 73-4.

24 William B. Quandt, "Lyndon Johnson and the June 1967 War: What Color Was the Light?" *Middle East Journal*, Spring 1992, p. 221, fn. 68.

25 *Hussein of Jordan: My "War" with Israel* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), p. 55; Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War*, p.110; Sadat, *In Search of Identity*, p. 174; Heikal, *1967: al-Infijar*, pp. 1062-3.

26 Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (London: Quartet Books, 1981), p. 23.

27 See, for example, David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 211; Col. Trevor N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 229; Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: The Six Days that Changed the Middle East* (New York: Linden Press, 1984), p. 196; Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Random House, 2003), pp. 58-9; Frank Brenchley, *Britain, the Six-Day War and Its Aftermath* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 17; Henry Laurens, "1967: A war of miscalculation and misjudgment," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, June 2007.

28 Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East*, pp. 97-8.

This Time, the Loser Writes History

Gabriel Glickman

It is a general law that every war is fought twice – first on the battlefield, then in the historiographical arena – and so it has been with the June 1967 Arab-Israeli war (or the Six-Day War as it is commonly known). No sooner had the dust settled on the battlefield than the Arabs and their Western partisans began rewriting the conflict's narrative with aggressors turned into hapless victims and defenders turned into aggressors. Jerusalem's weeks-long attempt to prevent the outbreak of hostilities in the face of a rapidly tightening Arab noose is completely ignored or dismissed as a disingenuous ploy; by contrast, the extensive Arab war preparations with the explicit aim of destroying the Jewish state is whitewashed as a demonstrative show of force to deter an imminent Israeli attack on Syria. It has even been suggested that Jerusalem lured the Arab states into war in order to expand its territory at their expense. So successful has this historiographical rewriting been that, fifty years after the war, these "alternative facts" have effectively become the received dogma, echoed by some of the most widely used college textbooks about the Middle East.[1]

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Grandstanding Gone Wrong

The first step to absolving the Arab leaders of culpability for the conflict – especially Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser, who set in motion the course of events that led to war – was to present them as victims of their fully understandable, if highly unfortunate, overreaction to a Soviet warning of an imminent Israeli attack on Syria. Taking at face value Nasser's postwar denial of any intention to attack Israel, educated Westerners – intellectuals, Middle East experts, and journalists – excused his dogged drive to war as an inescapable grandstanding aimed at shoring up his position in the face of relentless criticism by the conservative Arab states and the more militant elements within his administration.

"President Nasser had to take spectacular action in order to avert defeat in the struggle for leadership of the Arabs," argued American historian Ernest Dawn shortly after the war. "If Egypt had not acted, the 'conservatives' would have wasted no time in pointing to the hero's feet of clay."[2] This claim was amplified by Charles Yost, US president Lyndon Johnson's special envoy to the Middle East at the time of the crisis, as well as a string of early popular books on the war. Nasser had no intention of taking on Israel, they argued. The massive deployment of Egyptian troops in Sinai, in flagrant violation of the peninsula's demilitarization since the 1956 war; the expulsion of the UN observers deployed on the Egyptian side of the border with Israel; the closure of the Tiran Strait to Israeli navigation; and the rapid formation of an all-Arab war coalition for what he pledged would be the final battle for Israel's destruction were just posturing moves geared to deterring an Israeli attack on Syria and enhancing Nasser's pan-Arab prestige. Unfortunately, goes the narrative, Jerusalem overreacted to these measures, if not exploited them to its self-serving ends, by attacking its peaceable Arab neighbors.[3]

While this thesis clearly does not hold water – Nasser realized within less than a day that no Israeli attack on Syria was in the offing yet continued his reckless escalation[4] – it has quickly become a common historiographical axiom regarding the war's origin. Thus, as ideologically divergent commentators as British journalist David Hirst and American military commentator Trevor Dupuy agreed on this view

in the late 1970s. According to Dupuy, "it is very clear in retrospect that President Nasser did not in fact have any intention of precipitating war against Israel at that time."[5] Hirst took this argument a step further: "Not only did Nasser lack the means to take on Israel, he did not have the intention either."[6]

This assertion was reiterated almost verbatim in the coming decades by countless Middle East observers. Thus, for example, we have British journalist Patrick Seale claiming that "Nasser's strategy was to attempt to frighten Israel into prudence, while making it clear that he would not attack first,"[7] and Princeton professor L. Carl Brown arguing that "Nasser surely had not intended to seek a showdown with Israel in 1967."[8] As late as 2013, American legal scholar John Quigley was still voicing this misclaim:

> Nasser had reversed Egypt's 1956 losses with his action on shipping and with the removal of UNEF. If he could avoid an Israeli attack, he would have successfully stood up for the Arab cause, cost-free… Any indication that Egypt might attack was lacking.[9]

Indeed, so prevalent is the belief that Nasser did not intend to use his forces against Israel that anti-Israel extremist Norman Finkelstein confidently concluded that this was one of "only two issues in the otherwise highly contentious literature on the June 1967 war on which a consensus seems to exist."[10]

Most Israeli academic studies of the war, both traditional and revisionist, have invariably subscribed to this thesis in apparent deference to the prevailing consensus in the Middle Eastern studies milieu.[11] This conformity seems to have paid off as illustrated by the favorable reception of Michael Oren's *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* – the last decade's most salient Israeli account of the war. "Had Egypt intended to attack Israel immediately, the army's advances into Sinai could have been conducted as quietly as possible," Oren wrote. He continued:

> Nasser sent a double message to Israel: Egypt had no aggressive designs, but neither would it suffer any Israeli aggression against Syria.[12]

While writing the book, Oren was a researcher at the conservative Shalem Center and was later appointed Washington ambassador by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. So if an Israeli scholar on the right-wing end of the spectrum can portray the Jewish state as equally culpable for the war, rather than as the intended target of an imminent all-Arab aggression, while also vastly understating Nasser's role in precipitating the conflict, and if this account is warmly endorsed by former Prime Minister Ehud Barak, then surely it must be true.[13]

Who Is to Blame?

Some analysts have gone a step further in substituting victim for aggressor by blaming Jerusalem (rather than Cairo) for triggering the prewar crisis. Even the eminent French intellectual Raymond Aron, by no means an enemy of Israel, wondered during the war whether "General [Yitzhak] Rabin's threats against Syria [led] President Nasser to fear an American plot of which he would be the next victim."[14] But Nasser was certainly aware that there was no Israeli threat to Syria, and Rabin made no such threat. Rather, his alleged comments had been mixed up with an off-the-record press briefing by the head of military intelligence, Maj. Gen. Aharon Yariv, in which Yariv stressed the need for "an operation designed to *warn* the Syrians [and Egyptians] of the dangers of an all-out confrontation, not an operation that would itself be the confrontation."[15]

Still, the dogmatic denizens of Middle Eastern studies were not bothered by such factual niceties. Richard Parker, a veteran US career diplomat in the Middle East and editor of the *Middle East Journal*, interchangeably blamed Israeli security reprisals against Syria for the slide to war, tying them to the false Soviet warning of an imminent Israeli attack against Damascus.[16] In another influential account, William Quandt, a US government official and Middle Eastern studies professor, inexorably leads his readers to the foregone conclusion that Jerusalem, against Washington's better advice, took the first shots of the war[17] – when, in reality, the road to war had been paved by the Arab states' ganging up on Israel since mid-May and their vows to destroy it. This absolution of Nasser (and the Arab states more generally) creates the impression that the Israelis wanted war while the Arabs did not. Adding to the high

profile and assumed historiographical veracity of these two accounts was the authors' access to inside information in their past government capacities, something that was readily acknowledged by both authors, as was Quandt's alleged access (while in government) to documents prior to their release by the US archives.[18]

Another official who considered Jerusalem mostly culpable for events leading to the war was Gen. Odd Bull, a former chief of staff of the Norwegian Air Force who was later appointed chief of staff of the UN Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), tasked with monitoring the Syrian-Israeli border. Writing in his 1976 memoirs, he

> found public opinion [in Norway] regarded the Palestine problem almost entirely from the Israeli point of view … this was a problem with which I had been living for many years, and one which, as I had become very much aware, had at least two sides to it.

Bull, however, proceeded to criticize Israel alone in his account of the tumultuous years preceding the Six-Day War.[19] These accusations are all the more bizarre given that it was Bull who passed some of Israel's secret messages to Jordan's King Hussein upon the outbreak of hostilities on the Egyptian front, pleading with him to stay out of the fighting and pledging that in such an eventuality no harm would be visited upon his kingdom.[20]

Some of Israel's supporters also shifted historical responsibility from Nasser to the Jewish state. Thus, the eminent historian Walter Laqueur agreed with Finkelstein that Israel's use of reprisal raids against Arab states in response to periodic terror attacks from the latter's territory ultimately made the Jewish state responsible for Nasser's actions in May 1967. As he put it:

> Israel's policy of retaliation had lately exacerbated the conflict. But for Samu and the battle of 7 April, there would not have been a war in 1967… Then, in a few years' time, some Arab governments might be readier to resign themselves to Israel's existence.[21]

Andrew and Leslie Cockburn – known for their harsh criticism of Israel – and Winston and Randolph Churchill – labelled as "friendly

commentator[s] of the Six Day War" by Abba Eban[22] – concurred on the likely existence of secret US support for Israel despite President Johnson's meek public display of support.[23] In fact, the Johnson administration was far from resolute in its "secret support" of Israel. To the contrary, it even considered the hypothetical scenario of taking military action against the Jewish state. In the words of the Contingency Coordinating Committee, set up immediately after Nasser moved his troops into Sinai:

> We find that there is a vast array of possible contingencies that could develop out of the current situation… The use of our forces against Israel, even under UN cover, would certainly arouse domestic protest *except* in extreme cases of Israeli provocation or aggression.[24]

The eminent historian Bernard Lewis found it reasonable to wonder whether the Israelis were in some ways culpable for the events that led to war:

> The wars of 1948 and of 1973 were unmistakably launched by the decision of Arab governments… Responsibility for the war of 1967 is more difficult to allocate. As more information becomes available about the sequence of events leading to the opening of hostilities, it seems that the participants were like characters in a Greek tragedy, in which at every stage the various actors had no choice but to take the next step on the path to war.[25]

A US-Israeli Conspiracy?

During the run-up to war, the Egyptian state-controlled media repeatedly accused Washington of "seeking excuses for an armed intervention against the Arab nation to support Israel,"[26] with Nasser himself claiming that "Israel today is the United States"[27] – effectively equating war against Israel with fighting the United States. Once the extraordinary magnitude of the Arab defeat transpired, the most implausible conspiracy theories were swiftly spawned. Foremost among these was the claim that Israel did not actually win the war; rather the United States won it on its behalf, both by arming the Jewish state to its teeth – although France was Israel's main arms supplier at the time – and by destroying the Egyptian air force. It has even been argued that in triggering the war, Jerusalem was merely a pawn in Washington's ploy to divert American public opinion from the unwinnable war in Vietnam.[28]

The notion quickly gained its dedicated subscribers. Thus, the idea was put forward in a biography of Nasser by the veteran British diplomat Anthony Nutting[29] as well as in a collection of essays on the Arab perspective on the war, including an essay, "The Arab Portrayed," in which Edward Said appears to have set up the prototype for his *Orientalism* book.[30] As late as 2008, the American historian Douglas Little attributed Nasser's defeat to the fictional collusion between Washington and Jerusalem, which enabled "Israel's swift seizure of the Sinai, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights, with the blessing of Lyndon Johnson."[31]

Israel's "Unfinished Business"

But the story does not end here. In the eyes of a growing number of Western observers of the Middle East, the alleged Israeli machinations against Syria, whether or not in cahoots with Washington, were not related to actual developments on the ground (e.g., the all-Arab attempt to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River so as to deny them to Israel). Rather, such maneuvers were a vital link in a long chain of aggressions stemming from the Jewish state's very existence as a colonial outpost in the midst of the Arab world. David Hirst gave this thesis a name: "Greater Israel."[32]

The first comprehensive account of the Six-Day War in this vein, by the prominent Marxist French Orientalist Maxime Rodinson, was published as early as 1968. According to Rodinson, the war was all but inevitable since Israel's very existence was at odds with the greater ebb and flow of the Middle East. Unlike the "accidental war" theory of shared Arab-Israeli culpability, or even those who blamed Jerusalem for sparking the crisis leading to war, Rodinson unabashedly claimed the existence of a secret Israeli plan to trigger a war even as he occasionally showed some sympathy for the historic plight of Jews.[33] As he put it:

> It is difficult not to give some credit to the subsidiary hypothesis: that the situation was stirred up by the Israeli activist clique as part of a manoeuvre to provoke an Arab reaction which would force Israel to assume an "energetic" policy and bring them back into power [i.e., Ben-Gurion].[34]

Rodinson's extreme anti-Israel animosity is further revealed in the Jewish state's denigration as an alien colonial imposition on a hapless native population and his appeal for the removal of Israel's Jewish identity (i.e., its effective elimination) in favor of a binational state as a means to avoid more wars in the future.[35] While Rodinson's thesis of a colonial-settler Jewish state by its very existence impeding the prospects of a peaceful Middle East was hardly original, echoing as it did longstanding Marxist precepts[36] and more recent Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) propaganda,[37] his book resonated over time, helping to plant the seeds of the "postcolonial paradigm" that was to gain preeminence in Middle Eastern studies in future decades.

Following in Rodinson's footsteps, some historians took it upon themselves to be deliberately subjective in their work in order to correct a historical narrative that they viewed as having been biased in favor of the victor (i.e., Israel), hence harmful to the public's understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that came to the forefront as a result of the war. Abdullah Schleifer, for example, an American Jewish convert to Islam, journalist, and eyewitness observer of the war, argued in his 1972 book, *The Fall of Jerusalem*, that the victory of the Jewish state was mistakenly described by early accounts as a "miracle" when it was actually the culmination of long-standing Israeli aggression in the region.[38]

Similarly, it has become commonplace among scholars to depict the 1967 war as a premeditated campaign by Israeli leaders to expand beyond the country's borders. Thus, for example, one of the most recent book-length histories – Quigley's 2013 account – contains the following conclusion about Israel's, not Nasser's, ultimate culpability for the war: "The June 1967 war, rather than serving as precedent for preventative war, should be the poster child for pretextual invocation of force used in advance [by Israel]."[39] A similar explanation was offered by other scholars.[40]

The Oxford historian Albert Hourani endorsed this conspiracy theory about the war's origin:

Israel knew itself to be militarily and politically stronger than its Arab neighbours … in the face of threats from those neighbours,

the best course was to show its strength. This might lead to a more stable agreement than it had been able to achieve; but behind this there lay the hope of conquering the rest of Palestine and ending the unfinished business of 1948.[41]

This assertion does not even stand a simple scrutiny of the prewar timeline. The West Bank had not been implicated in the evolving Egyptian-Israeli crisis before King Hussein joined Nasser's bandwagon some two weeks after its flare-up; and even then, had the king heeded Jerusalem's secret appeals on June 5 to stay out of the war, this territory would have remained under Jordanian control.[42]

Yet, if a leading historian of the Middle East could endorse such an ahistorical travesty, it is hardly surprising that other similarly prominent historians, whose expertise lies outside the Middle East, fell for this conspiracy theory. For example, Tony Judt, a British historian of Europe, wrote that "the war of 1967 is best regarded in the light in which Israel's generals saw it at the time: as unfinished business left over from the War of Independence."[43]

Conclusion

They say that history is written by the victor, but the 1967 war has been rewritten by the losers and their international champions. Just as the failed pan-Arab attempt to destroy Israel at birth has been transformed into a "catastrophe" (or Nakba) inflicted on the unfortunate and peaceable Arabs by an aggressive foreign invader, so the stillborn attempt to complete the unfinished business of 1948 has been turned into yet another story of Arab victimhood, though it is unclear to what extent this narrative has been accepted by Western publics at large.

The degree to which Western historiography has increasingly portrayed Israel's preemptive strike against Egypt as an act of aggression rather than of self-defense leaves one wondering why Western scholars cannot accept that a proud and independent Arab leader was capable of making grand moves on the global stage. The British historian Elie Kedourie once commented that "the threat to use military force is not, in principle,

different from the use of force itself."[44] Nasser, followed by the heads of most Arab states, not to mention PLO chairman Ahmad Shuqeiri, indulged in weeks of extermination threats vis-à-vis Israel. It is not the job of the historian to play the role of psychologist and attempt to substitute victimhood for malignant incompetence and shortsightedness.

NOTES

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2   Ernest C. Dawn, "The Egyptian Remilitarization of Sinai," *Journal of Contemporary History*, July 1968, p. 213.

3   William Stevenson, *Israeli Victory* (London: Corgi Books, 1967), p. 28; Charles W. Yost, "How the Arab-Israeli War Began," *Foreign Affairs*, Jan. 1968, p. 317-8; Maxime Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968), pp. 198-200; Roderick MacLeish, *The Sun Stood Still: Perspectives on the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1968), p. 18.

4   Efraim Karsh, "The Six-Day War: An Inevitable Conflict," *Middle East Quarterly*, Summer 2017.

5   Trevor N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p. 229-30.

6   David Hirst, *The Gun and the Olive Branch: The Roots of Violence in the Middle East* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977), p. 211.

7   Patrick Seale, *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), p. 131.

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9   John Quigley, *The Six-Day War and Israeli Self-Defense: Questioning the Legal Basis for Preventative War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), pp. 44-5. See, also, Donald Neff, *Warriors for Jerusalem: The Six Days that Changed the Middle East* (New York: Linden Press, 1984), p. 196; Andrew and Leslie Cockburn, *Dangerous Liaison: The Inside Story of the U.S.-Israeli Covert Relationship* (New York: Harper Collins, 1991), p. 139.

10   Norman Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict* (London: Verso, 1995), p. 134.

11   See, for example, Raymond Cohen, "Intercultural Communication between Israel and Egypt: Deterrence Failure before the Six-Day War," *Review of International Studies*, Jan. 1988, p. 10;

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12   Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2002), pp. 58-9.

13   See, for example, David Remnick, "The Seventh Day: Why the Six Day War is still being fought," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2007, review of Tom Segev, *1967: Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007); Ali Gharib, "Michael Oren and the End of Liberal Zionism," *The Nation*, June 25, 2015.

14   Raymond Aron, *De Gaulle, Israel, and the Jews* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1969), p. 72.

15   Richard Parker, ed., *The Six Day War: A Retrospective* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1996), p. 32, emphasis in original.

16   See, for example, Richard Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 16, 20, 41, 60, 98.

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18   Ibid., pp. vii-viii; Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation*, p. xi; Parker, *The Six Day War*, p. 205.

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20   Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 184.

21   Finkelstein, *Image and Reality of the Israel-Palestine Conflict*, pp. 125-7; Walter Laqueur, *The Road to War 1967: The Origins of the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968), p. 233.

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24   "Contingency Planning on Arab-Israeli Conflict, May 22, 1967," U.S. National Archives (USNA), College Park, Md., *Middle East Crisis Files 1967*, Box 2, emphasis in original.

25   Bernard Lewis, *The Middle East: A Brief History of the Last 2,000 Years* (New York: Scribner, 1995), pp. 364-5.

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27   Ibid., May 26, 1967, FBIS, May 29, 1967 (B2).

28   See, for example, Muhammad Hassanein Heikal, *Nasser: The Cairo Documents* (London: New English Library, 1972), ch. 7; idem, *Sphinx and Commissar: The Rise and Fall of Soviet Influence in the Middle East* (London: Collins, 1978), ch. 10; idem, 1967: *Al-Infijar* (Cairo: Ahram, 1990), pp. 317-30, 371-80, 419-25, 490-500. For Nasser's political manipulation of the alleged U.S. machinations vis-à-vis Egypt, see, for example, "President Nasser's Speech at Cairo University on February 22, 1967," FCO 39/245, The British National Archives, Kew, London; Minutes by D.J. Speares, Feb. 24, 1967, FCO 39/245, British National Archives; Letter from Fletcher to Unwin, No. 1036/67, Mar. 2, 1967, FCO 39/245, British National Archives.

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31   Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), p. 32.

32   Hirst, "Greater Israel," *The Gun and the Olive Branch*, ch. 7.

33   See, for example, Rodinson, *Israel and the Arabs*, p. 230.

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35   Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (New York: Monad Press, 1973), pp. 219, 234-5.

36   Isaac Deutscher, "Interview with Isaac Deutscher: On the Israeli-Arab War," *New Left Review*, July-Aug. 1967, pp. 30-45.

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43 Tony Judt, "After Victory: Review of *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* by Michael Oren," *The New Republic*, July 29, 2002.

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Israel's Costs vs. Its Benefits

Efraim Inbar

The June 1967 war was a major watershed in Israel's political history. The astounding military victory was a key factor in driving parts of the Arab world to confront the reality of Jewish statehood. The war's territorial acquisitions, by contrast, are often seen as a mixed blessing. For although these gains gave birth to the land-for-peace formula (commonly associated with Security Council resolution 242 of November 1967), which led to the historic March 1979 Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty, Israel's continued control of the Golan Heights and the West Bank has put it under persistent international pressure. The fiftieth anniversary of the war offers an auspicious vantage point for rethinking the pros and cons of retaining these territories.

Military and Strategic Importance

There is little doubt that the foremost gain attending Israel's 1967 victory lies in the transformation of the international discourse about the country's future borders, with the June 1967 line (or the Green Line) becoming the starting point for any such discussion. This represents a sea change for Israel, whose neighbors had previously refused to accept its very existence, let alone its initial borders.

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The highly restrictive borders delineated by the UN partition resolution of November 1947 have almost entirely dropped off the international agenda, their only residual remnant being the international refusal to recognize West Jerusalem (internationalized by the resolution along the city's eastern part) as Israel's capital. Also overlooked are the repeated Arab attempts to slash Israel's pre-1967 territory, notably through the annexation by Egypt and Jordan of the Negev region, some 60 percent of Israel's territory, an idea that received occasional favorable hearing in London and Washington.[1]

The massive political and diplomatic achievement by Israel notwithstanding, the war's territorial acquisitions entailed a string of important military and strategic advantages. Control of the Golan Heights and the Jordan Valley, for one, gives Israel far better military lines of defense than it had before 1967. The current Golan border is the watershed line of the region, allowing the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) to hold the high ground with its clear defensive advantages. Nor is there any other line on the Golan to which Israel could withdraw while maintaining its topographical edge. The top of the cliffs that mark the western edge of the heights, sometimes mentioned as a possible line of withdrawal, would prevent the Syrians from having direct view into Israel, but it is no higher than the terrain to the east.

In addition, the IDF's presence on Mount Hermon enables the gathering of intelligence on goings-on in nearby Syrian areas and even further into the country. The claim that spy planes and satellites can replace the Hermon's intelligence value is only partially true as these measures have limited intelligence-gathering capabilities compared to the unlimited capabilities of the Hermon station. Moreover, there are weapon systems for downing airplanes and destroying satellites while it is exceedingly difficult to down a mountain. The presence of Israeli military forces just 60 kilometers from Damascus also has a deterrent value as it is far easier to attack the Syrian capital from the Golan Heights than from the Green Line. Indeed, the IDF's advance on Damascus in the October 1973 war was among the reasons why Syria agreed to end the war. Conversely, without Israel's defense line on the Golan, the Syrians would have managed to invade its territory at the beginning of that war – for the first time since the 1948 war – with tragic consequences for the Jewish state. Instead, the security margins provided by the Golan allowed the IDF to contain the Syrian offensive, to regroup, and to move onto the counterattack.

The demilitarization arrangements in the Sinai Peninsula, which served to stabilize Egyptian-Israeli strategic relations and paved the road to their historic peace treaty, are hardly applicable to the Golan given the marked size difference between the two arenas: a 200-kilometer-deep demilitarized zone in Sinai compared to the Golan's maximum width of 24 kilometers. It is far harder to launch a surprise attack in Sinai than on the Golan.

The security rationale for Israel's continued control of the Jordan Valley is a similar case in point. Even a cursory glance at the map shows that there are very few approaches from the east (that is, from Jordan) to the West Bank's hilly terrain, and from there, to the center of Israel. There is also a very large topographical difference between the Jordan Valley and Israel's watershed line, which runs north-south through Jerusalem, some 20 kilometers from the valley. The Jordan Valley lies some 250-400 meters below sea level while the hilltops are some 700-800 meters above sea level – an elevation difference of at least 1,000 meters. In the event of an attack from the east, an armored column would need to make a steep 20-kilometer climb with only a handful of armored-accessible routes. As long as the defending forces can hold the entrances to these routes, any such invasion can readily be rebuffed. This was the strategic logic behind the Allon plan of the late 1960s, which also made eminent demographic sense given that the Jordan Valley is almost entirely empty of Palestinian population.[2]

Israel's eastern border is its most important due to its proximity to the country's main population centers. The aerial distance from the Jordan River to Jerusalem is 20 kilometers, and to Tel Aviv, 80 kilometers; the distance from the pre-1967 Green Line to the Mediterranean Sea is at its narrowest some 16 kilometers. The Tel Aviv-Jerusalem-Haifa triangle, containing most of Israel's population and the bulk of its industrial and economic infrastructure, is very close to the Jordan River and a stone's throw from the Green Line. This is a wholly different case from the borders with Egypt, Syria, and Lebanon, hence the eastern border's great strategic importance, and hence the indispensability of an easily defensible border. The importance of keeping the border as far away as possible from the country's heartland has become even more pronounced over the past two decades when the coastal plane's economic and industrial centrality has steadily increased despite predictions of a more decentralized population due to developments in communication and transportation that brought the periphery closer to the center.

No less important is the preservation of Israel's control of the area known as Greater Jerusalem. As a quick glance at the map can easily reveal, Jerusalem, which is populated by a Jewish majority, marks the only intersection of the watershed line through which IDF forces can move from the center of the country to meet an invasion from Jordan. Of particular importance is the corridor from Jerusalem to Maale Adummim and down to the Jordan Valley. Hence it would be a grave strategic mistake to allow a foreign presence in Jerusalem that might threaten Israel's control of its most valuable west-east route. Moreover, the Greater Jerusalem area is highly elevated, giving the IDF valuable intelligence gathering capabilities toward the east, south, and north.

The historical, religious, and cultural importance of Jerusalem – the Temple Mount in particular – for the Jewish people goes without saying, yet lies beyond the scope of this article. It is clear, however, that territorial concessions in Jerusalem are likely to be viewed as a victory for Islam and to fuel extremist sentiments throughout the Muslim and Arab worlds. It is also true that Israeli control of the holy Jewish sites (and the holy Christian sites for that matter) guarantees free and uninterrupted access and freedom of worship – in stark contrast to the Palestinian attitude toward their religious minorities, let alone to Jewish holy sites under their control, such as the synagogue in Jericho or Joseph's Tomb in Nablus.

Israel's military control of the West Bank also has an important role in fighting Palestinian terrorism. Regrettably, the Palestinian Authority (PA) has not only failed to meet its obligations to combat terrorism and to disarm all terror groups in the territories under its jurisdiction, as required by the Oslo accords of the 1990s, but has also abetted and actively perpetrated anti-Israel terrorism, especially during the Arafat years. The need for Israeli control was clearly demonstrated by Operation Defensive Shield of March-April 2002 and the subsequent Israeli recapture of some PA-held territory, which allowed the IDF to destroy terror infrastructures and to restore the intelligence capabilities vital for fighting terrorism. While Israel has withdrawn from most of these territories, the IDF continues to enjoy certain freedom of movement throughout the West Bank, entering many areas on a regular basis and, as a consequence, thwarting numerous terror attacks. In terms of counterterrorism, this is a major boon that prevents terrorists from blowing up themselves and

Israeli citizens in Tel Aviv or Jerusalem; indeed, the past decade has seen a substantial reduction in the number of suicide bombings on Israeli soil. This reduction is largely due to Israel's offensive activities, such as preemptive arrests and targeted killings, with the newly erected security fence playing a secondary role in curbing Palestinian terror attacks.[3]

The limited cooperation between the IDF and the PA security forces, developed after Arafat's death in November 2004, hardly suffices to prevent terrorism from areas under the PA's control. Quite the reverse in fact: Contrary to its "moderate" international image, the PA under Mahmoud Abbas remains as active a source of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish incitement as it was under Arafat, continuing to encourage terror, if with lesser intensity than before.[4] In the absence of a reliable and peaceable Palestinian partner, there can be no breakthrough toward mutual reconciliation. Relinquishing military control of the West Bank in the absence of a peace-seeking Palestinian leadership is all the more dangerous given the massive difficulties in recapturing this territory in the not unlikely eventuality that the newly established Palestinian state would become a fully fledged terrorist entity as has happened in Gaza following the Israeli withdrawal.[5]

Standard Strategic Misconceptions

It has, of course, been argued, notably by the late Shimon Peres, that territory has lost its importance in the age of missiles. This claim may have some merit but is historically shortsighted and strategically misconceived. Throughout history, generations of warfare have produced dramatic technological changes that resulted in equally dramatic vicissitudes in the fortunes of defensive or offensive postures. Thus, for example, the walls and castles of the medieval age improved defensive capabilities for some 500-600 years until the arrival of a new technology – the cannon – put an end to these measures and ushered in a new military reality. While missile attacks on population centers (in themselves an unequivocal war crime) are undeniably difficult to contend with, there has been immense investment in missile defense technology, some of which is already operational and effective, such as Israel's Arrow and Iron Dome systems.

Likewise, the conventional assumptions about the Arab world's political realities and their implications for regional security hardly hold water. It has been claimed, for instance, that given the Jordanian regime's

historically less hostile attitude to Israel and its longstanding (albeit covert) objection to the creation of a Palestinian state, there is no need for Israel to retain control of the Jordan Valley. Yet, just as King Hussein jumped on the pan-Arab bandwagon shortly before the outbreak of the 1967 war – after Israel had saved his life on a number of occasions – so his son King Abdullah may well be tempted into a future adventure, however unlikely this may seem at the moment.

Nor is it possible to predict with any certainty whether and for how long the Hashemite dynasty will be able to withstand the challenge of radical Islam or the creation of a Palestinian state, which may readily incite the kingdom's marginalized Palestinian population against its monarchical rulers. The attempt by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to topple the Hashemite regime in the autumn of 1970 backfired in grand style. Given the substantial increase in Jordan's Palestinian population since then, and with the aid and support of a fully fledged Palestinian state, especially if ruled by the more militant and effective Hamas, they may well achieve this goal in the future, thus creating a vast Palestinian state on both sides of the Jordan River.[6]

Similarly, the expectations that a newly established Palestinian state will meet its contractual peace obligations and refrain from siding with Israel's enemies in future military confrontations, let alone refrain from wholesale anti-Israel terrorism, runs counter to the Palestinian modus operandi during the past twenty-four years, as well as their relentless commitment to Israel's destruction in flagrant violation of their contractual obligations in the Oslo accords.[7]

Recurring suggestions for stationing international forces on the Golan Heights and in the Jordan Valley as a means to allay Israel's security concerns are equally misconceived. As consistently shown on several past occasions, the presence of UN peacekeeping forces in Arab-Israeli conflict areas proved totally useless. In May 1967, these forces were instantaneously withdrawn from the Egyptian-Israeli border where they had served as a buffer between the two sides the moment President Nasser demanded their removal. Likewise, in September 2014, UN forces were evacuated from the Golan Heights as fighting in the Syrian civil war intensified. In Lebanon, the peacekeeping force

deployed since the late 1970s (UN Interim Force in Lebanon) failed to prevent countless clashes between Israel and the PLO, then between Israel and Hezbollah. Nor did it manage to prevent the Islamist terror group from rebuilding its military infrastructure after the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war as required by Security Council Resolution 1701 of August 11, 2006.

The permanent deployment of US peacekeeping forces offers no greater assurances. Washington quickly withdrew its forces from confrontation zones when the going got tough (Lebanon 1984, Somalia 1993, etc.), and its recent unhappy experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq are hardly conducive to a future, long-term commitment of US troops to one of the region's longest running conflicts.

No less importantly, a major part of Israel's strategic value for the United States, and Western nations more generally, lies in its ability to defend itself on its own against any local (and at times external) enemies. This capability stands in marked contrast to the West's Arab clients, which often needed large-scale foreign intervention on their behalf (Moscow's 1970 intervention in the Egyptian-Israeli war of attrition and in the ongoing Syrian civil war; the US-led liberation of Kuwait, etc.). Predicating a significant part of Israel's security on international protection will largely erode this strategic edge.

Israel Must Retain the West Bank and the Golan

The above discussion underscores Israel's dire need for secure borders, resistant to changes in military technology and regional political upheavals. A policy that fails to take into account worst-case scenarios would be highly irresponsible. As political scientist Yehezkel Dror often remarked, in the Middle East, there is a high probability for improbable scenarios. In these circumstances, Israel's improved defensive, intelligence, and deterrent capabilities, thanks to its current borders, have a strong stabilizing effect on its relations with the neighboring Arab states by expanding its security margins and reducing its need for preventive or preemptive strikes, which entail domestic and foreign political costs.

Continuing to hold on to the territories entails additional advantages. To begin with, it underscores Israel's ability to resist persistent Arab and international pressure for withdrawal – a highly important demonstration of strength in a region where crude force constitutes the main instrument of political discourse, both domestically and externally, and where military might, in its different forms, is the most respected political currency. The fact that, despite recurrent international criticism and myriad anti-Israel UN resolutions, the Jewish state has managed to retain its control of the territories has also demonstrated its political and diplomatic stamina. The foremost supportive factor in this respect has been Washington's continued support for the Israeli demand for an Arab attitudinal change before there can be any real progress toward peace. This support has been rendered all the more important over the past decades as the United States became the "only remaining superpower" following the Soviet Union's collapse – a position it continues to hold despite the foreign policy setbacks of the Obama years.

Above all, and contrary to the conventional mis-conception, Israel's continued control of the territories offers the best, perhaps the only chance of Palestinian-Israeli peace. Given the categorical Arab rejection of the idea of Jewish statehood on the one hand, and the preeminence of physical force in Middle Eastern political culture on the other, Israel's presence in the territories constitutes a permanent reminder of Arab impotence and the futility of sustaining the conflict.

It was indeed the grudging realization that Israel would not be destroyed by force of arms that drove some of its Arab enemies to the negotiating table. Egypt received the entire Sinai Peninsula only after concluding a fully fledged peace treaty with Israel while the PLO was given control over the Gaza Strip and the vast majority of the West Bank's Palestinian population (and some 40 percent of the area's territory) after signing the Oslo accords, whereby it undertook to eschew violence, terrorism, and incitement. That the organization failed to abide by its contractual obligations, with Gaza becoming an unreconstructed terrorist entity under Hamas's rule, affords further proof, if such were needed, of the West Bank's critical importance for Israel's future security.

The Costs of Continued Control

After the 1967 war, the international community seemed to accept Israel's permanent retention of some of its territorial acquisitions as vividly illustrated by Security Council Resolution 242, which provided for the "[w]ithdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict." The absence of the definite article "the" before "territories" – which, had it been included, would have required a complete Israeli withdrawal – was no accident but rather reflected an awareness of the existential threat posed by its pre-1967 boundaries. Indeed, the resolution envisaged this partial withdrawal to take place not as a unilateral move but as part of a comprehensive Arab-Israeli peace that would allow every state in the region "to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force."[8] And while the resolution's intent has been misrepresented over the years by the Arabs and their international champions supposedly to demand Israel's complete withdrawal from the territories, the notion that this will take place within the framework of a Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement has remained intact. There is no international demand (apart from those of the PA and its staunchest allies) for a unilateral withdrawal without a political quid pro quo and some security arrangements.

Thus far, the cost of retaining the West Bank and the Golan Heights has not been particularly high. This should allow Israel to conduct negotiations over the future of these territories in a considered and patient fashion from a position of strength. For one thing, time clearly works in Israel's favor: Since its establishment sixty-nine years ago, the Jewish state has steadily grown stronger and more advanced while its Arab adversaries have correspondingly become weaker.[9] For another thing, the frenzied rush to far-reaching territorial concessions – by Ehud Barak in the Camp David and Taba summits (July 2000 and January 2001) and Ehud Olmert in the Annapolis conference (November 2007) – has proved highly counterproductive, further fueling Palestinian rejectionism and triggering the longest and bloodiest war of terror (euphemized as al-Aqsa Intifada) since the 1948 war. This, in turn, persuaded most Israelis that they had no real peace partner and that the establishment of a Palestinian state was a rather hypothetical

possibility so long as no such partner existed. The future status of the Golan Heights, which Barak was equally keen to surrender, only to be flatly rebuffed by President Hafez Assad, has also been rendered largely irrelevant by the ongoing Syrian civil war.

Indeed, as far as Syria is concerned, the cost of retaining the Golan has been strikingly low. Since 1974, Damascus has scrupulously observed the October 1973 ceasefire agreement and the border has been conspicuously quiet. This status quo suits Israel well, being strategically placed on the Golan, which unlike the West Bank is very sparsely populated (mostly by Druze, some of whom are Israeli citizens) hence poses no demographic problem. Furthermore, since the onset of the twenty-first century, Syria has been regionally and internationally isolated due to its intervention in Lebanon and special relationship with Tehran. As a result, its claim for the Golan has gone largely unheeded and its (however timid) hopes for retaking this territory by force have been dashed by the absence of a reliable war ally for this daunting undertaking. Apparently cognizant of its inability to occupy the Golan on its own, Damascus has concentrated on developing its defensive capabilities and expanding its long-range missiles arsenal, mainly designed to deter an Israeli aggression.

Since 2011, Syria has been ravaged by civil war, whose end is nowhere in sight. Nor is it clear whether the country will be able to retain its unitary form or instead disintegrate along ethnic and confessional lines. Yet even if Damascus were to weather the storm, it has little to offer in exchange for a peace treaty with Israel. The key to Israel's acceptance by the region is not to be found in Damascus: It is a historical process that has been in the making since Egypt signed the first disengagement agreement with Israel in the wake of the October 1973 war, subsequently expanding to Jordan, the Gulf states, and the Maghreb states. Syria has long since lost its veto power over other Arab states' contacts with Israel. Moreover, it is unlikely to expect Damascus to cut ties with Tehran, its ally since the late 1970s and foremost savior of the Bashar al-Assad regime. Indeed, repeated US efforts since the mid-1970s to extricate Syria from the radical camp have come to naught. It is also difficult to see Damascus severing relations with terror organizations, notably Hezbollah, which serves as an avenue of influence over Lebanon. At the end of the day, Lebanon is far more important to Syria than the Golan.

In short, it seems that nothing that Syria can offer would outweigh the detrimental effects of relinquishing the Golan Heights as part of a peace treaty, especially since it has never been clear whether Syria is interested in peace as Israel understands it.[10] Rather, it appears more interested in negotiations over a treaty with Israel with the process itself being more important than the outcome. Negotiations can protect Damascus from what it fears most: Israeli or US aggression.

The Turkish-Syrian context may be instructive. Ankara's conflict with Damascus was similar to Israel's, revolving as it did on disagreements over water, terrorism, and territory. Eventually, the Syrians decided at the end of the 1990s to acquiesce in Ankara's water policy regarding the Euphrates, to stop supporting Kurdish terrorism against Turkey, and to drop their demands for the return of the Alexandretta district. Damascus's acceptance of Ankara's terms was above all a result of its marked military inferiority. Israel should similarly make the most of its superiority over Syria.

In the West Bank, the situation is different, largely because of the demographic issue and its political implications. As noted above, the PLO/PA behavior since the conclusion of the Oslo accords inspires little confidence in its peaceable intentions. Hamas's sweeping victory in the 2006 parliamentary elections, its violent takeover of the Gaza Strip a year later, and the growing influence in Palestinian society of other Islamist groups cast serious doubts about the Palestinians' readiness in the foreseeable future to end their hundred-year conflict with the Zionist movement.

By contrast, and given the broad unanimity in Israel about the necessity of separation from the Palestinian population of the West Bank and Gaza, Jerusalem should keep open the option for a territorial compromise that would allow the establishment of an independent Palestinian entity along the lines of the Allon plan. Of course, there is no certainty that such an entity will actually be established in view of the Palestinians' massive state-building inadequacies over the past twenty-four years. They have most glaringly failed to meet the Weberian test of state building – maintaining state monopoly over the means of violence – by consciously enabling the existence of various armed militias that have spread widespread mayhem and chaos (or *fawda*, as they call it).

If the Palestinians are politically incapable of engaging in state building, then it might be helpful to place them under the tutelage of the neighboring Arab states – Egypt in Gaza, Jordan in the West Bank. Of course, neither state is particularly keen on shouldering this daunting task; yet precisely for this reason, Israel should strive to ensure that the solution to the Palestinian problem is not placed solely at its doorstep.

The time seems ripe for such a change. The ongoing Arab upheavals and the surge of jihadist Islam make the world far less captivated by the Palestinian illusion with many states prepared to consider alternative solutions to the problem. Even among the Arabs, there are growing voices that question the centrality of the Palestinian issue.[11] In these circumstances, recurrent Israeli suggestions for unilateral withdrawal, born of the yearning for the resumption of the peace process, cannot be more misconceived. If the Gaza experience teaches anything, it is that a unilateral withdrawal without ironclad guarantees against the transformation of the evacuated territory into a terrorist hotbed is an assured recipe for disaster.

In the absence of a worthy partner capable of effective control of the prospective Palestinian entity – and as long as Jordan or Egypt would not assume any role in managing Palestinian affairs – Israel will need to continue to deal with a weak and corrupt Palestinian Authority for some time to come. In this respect, it should be noted that even in the worst-case scenario that the PA would initiate another war of terror, its economic implications for Israel will be rather negligible. During the 1987-93 intifada and the "al-Aqsa Intifada," only 5-10 percent of the national security budget was allocated to fighting terrorism. The use of infantry units, in contrast to naval and air formations, is relatively cheap.[12] This is a "small war" of the type that requires limited investment of resources. Nor has the diplomatic cost of the two intifadas been particularly high. The negative views, in which Israel's continued control of the West Bank are held throughout the international system, have had only peripheral effect, certainly as long as Washington is willing to accept the status quo.

The truth of the matter is that the Palestinians' unhappy situation is primarily self-inflicted. Rather than promote a real quest for independence and state and nation building, Palestinian leaders, from the 1920s to the present day, have driven their hapless subjects from one disaster to another

while lining their pockets from the proceeds of this misery.[13] Keenly aware of this reality, most Israelis resent paying the price by being forced into an unsatisfactory agreement that would imperil their national security, indeed the very existence of their state. This is all the more so since the launch of the September 2000 Palestinian war of terror – seen by most Israelis not as a war of choice but one that has been forced on Israel. According to many public opinion surveys, Israel's majority Jewish population displays great resilience to the difficult tests attending "small wars."

In the absence of a peace agreement, it is crucial for Israel to stick to its guns, so to speak. The military struggle against the Palestinians is bound to determine the country's eastern border, which must run along the Jordan River. Moreover, the conflict with the Palestinians may also shape the future security arrangements in the West Bank in the event of a partial withdrawal from these areas. It would be a major mistake to view the "small war" with the Palestinians as unimportant or as a distraction from the IDF's ability to concentrate on more dangerous scenarios. The IDF's current tasks regarding the Palestinians are part and parcel of its overall duties, and it needs to develop the necessary organizational and conceptual flexibility for effectively coping with this challenge, which, in the final account, touches the core of Israel's existential problems.

Conclusion

Israel's control of the Golan Heights and the West Bank has many advantages, which in turn outweigh the attendant costs of holding onto these territories. While Israel can agree that the West Bank's densely populated areas (designated as areas A and B by the Oslo accords) where most of the Palestinian population lives, could become an independent political entity or be annexed to Jordan as part of a bilateral peace agreement, maintaining military control over the area west of the Jordan River is essential for its national security (and for Jordanian security for that matter). Unfortunately, there is no room for a territorial compromise on the Golan Heights. Losing this territory would entail grave security threats, and there is nothing Syria has to offer to compensate for this loss.

NOTES

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