

The 1967 Six-Day War

So much of present history has emerged from the Six Day War and its aftermath; the following summary underlines the key issues.

Before the War

In the years before the Six-Day War, Syria used the Golan Heights, which tower 3,000 feet above the Galilee, to shell Israeli farms and villages. Syria's attacks grew more frequent in 1965 and 1966, while Nasser's rhetoric became increasingly bellicose. In 1965, he expressed the Arabs' aspiration: "...the full restoration of the rights of the Palestinian people. In other words, we aim at the destruction of the State of Israel. The immediate aim: perfection of Arab military might. The national aim: the eradication of Israel."

Provocation

On May 15, Israel's Independence Day, Egyptian troops moved into the Sinai and massed near the Israeli border. By May 18, Syrian troops were prepared for battle along the Golan Heights. On May 22, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli shipping and all ships bound for Eilat. This blockade cut off Israel's only supply route with Asia and stopped the flow of oil from its main supplier, Iran. King Hussein of Jordan signed a defense pact with Egypt on May 30 and on June 4, Iraq joined the military alliance with Egypt, Jordan and Syria.

Belligerent statements from Arab leaders calling for the destruction of Israel continued as Arab forces mobilized. Approximately 250,000 troops (nearly half in Sinai), more than 2,000 tanks and 700 aircraft ringed Israel.

Israel could not remain fully mobilized indefinitely, nor could it allow its sea lane through the Gulf of Aqaba to be interdicted. Israel had no choice but preemptive action. To do this successfully, Israel needed the element of surprise. Had it waited for an Arab invasion, Israel would have been at a potentially catastrophic disadvantage. On June 5, the order was given to attack Egypt.

Jerusalem Is Attacked

Prime Minister Levi Eshkol sent a message to King Hussein saying Israel would not attack Jordan unless Hussein initiated hostilities. When Jordanian radar picked up a cluster of planes flying from Egypt to Israel, and the Egyptians convinced Hussein the planes were Egyptian, Hussein ordered the shelling of West Jerusalem. It turned out the planes were Israel's, and were returning from destroying the Egyptian air force on the ground.

Once Jerusalem came under fire, Israel needed to defend it, and, in doing so, took the opportunity to unify its capital once and for all.

The Stunning Victory

After just six days of fighting, Israeli forces were in a position to march on Cairo, Damascus and Amman. A ceasefire was invoked on June 10.

The victory came at a very high cost. In storming the Golan Heights, Israel suffered 115 dead--roughly the number of Americans killed during Operation Desert Storm. Altogether, Israel lost twice as many men — 777 dead and 2,586 wounded--in proportion to her total population as the U.S. lost in eight years of fighting in Vietnam. Also, despite the incredible success of the air campaign, the Israeli Air Force lost 46 of its 200 fighters.

By the end of the war, Israel had occupied enough territory to more than triple the size of the area it controlled, from 8,000 to 26,000 square miles. The victory enabled Israel to unify Jerusalem. Israeli forces had also captured the Sinai, Golan Heights, Gaza Strip and West Bank.

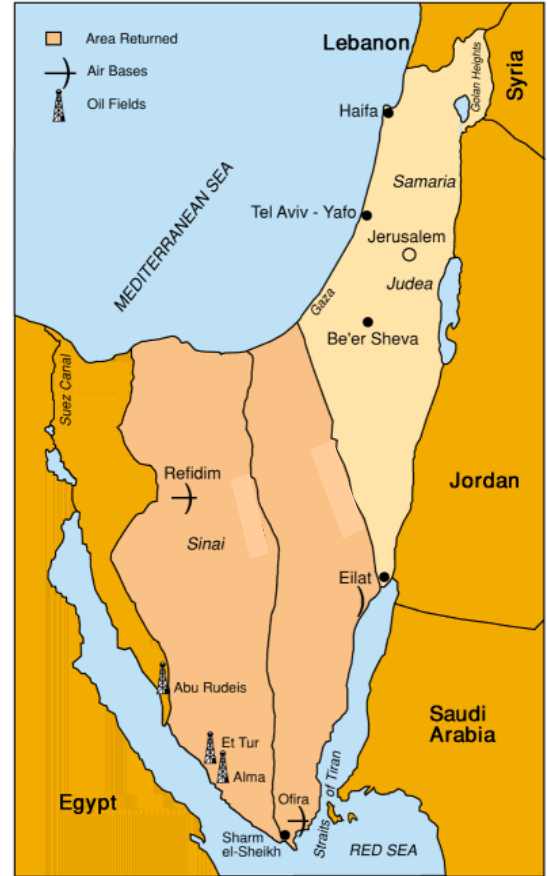
Resolution 242

In November 1967, the UN adopted Resolution 242, which established a formula for Arab-Israeli peace. The Resolution includes provisions for Israeli withdrawal from some territories occupied in the war in exchange for peace with its neighbors, but makes no specific territorial concessions. Resolution 242 refers to "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in recent conflict." The authors of the resolution intentionally omitted the word "**the**" from territories. Britain's George Brown, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1967), and one of the creators of 242, said that, "The proposal said ' Israel will withdraw from territories that were occupied', and not from '**the**' territories, which means that Israel will not withdraw from all the territories." Moreover, the resolution never specifies territories that should be returned such as West Bank, Gaza Strip, or eastern Jerusalem. Arthur Goldberg, the US Ambassador to the U.N., stated that there would be "less than a complete withdrawal" because " Israel's prior frontiers had been proven notably insecure." Resolution 242 also speaks of the need for "secure and recognized boundaries" and calls for the resolution of the refugee problem, both Jewish and Arab. This resolution has served as the basis for peace negotiations from that time on.



Cease-Fire Lines After the Six-Day War

Withdrawal from Sinai Following the Israel– Egypt Peace Treaty



Withdrawal from Sinai Following the Israel-Egypt Peace Treaty

