

THE 1967 SIX-DAY WAR 50 YEARS LATER



Produced by: Dr. Mitchell Bard American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise in cooperation with StandWithUs

The Causes of War

- In the War of 1948, Israel vanquished the Arab states that invaded following its declaration of independence. None of the defeated Arab countries agreed to peace; instead, they vowed to fight again.
- In 1956, following months of terrorist attacks from the Gaza Strip, and Egyptian President Gamal Nasser's closure of the Straits of Tiran, preventing Israel from transiting the international waterway, Israel fought Egypt in the Suez War.
- In exchange for Israel withdrawing from the Sinai Desert captured during the Suez War, a UN force was sent to the area to ensure peace between Israel and Egypt.
- In 1964, with the Israel National Water Carrier nearing completion, the Arab League decided to divert two rivers feeding into the Jordan River, reducing Israel's water supply. In April 1967, Israel bombed two Syrian dams threatening its water resources.
- The Arab League created the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) in 1964 as a weapon to use against Israel. In 1965, thirty-five terrorist raids were conducted against Israel by the PLO. In 1966, the number increased to forty-one. In just the first four months of 1967, thirty-seven terror attacks were launched to kill Israeli civilians.
- Syria shelled farms and villages in northern Israel from the Golan Heights, finally provoking an Israeli retaliatory strike on April 7, 1967.
- As tensions rose, Nasser declared on May 2, 1967, "Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel." Similarly, Syrian Defense Minister Hafez al-Assad said, "The time has come to enter a battle of annihilation." PLO Chairman Ahmad Shuqeiri went even further, proclaiming, "We shall destroy Israel and its inhabitants...."
- On May 18, 1967, Nasser ordered the UN peacekeeping force out of Sinai.
- On May 22, Egypt blockaded the Strait of Tiran to all Israeli ships. President Lyndon Johnson declared Egypt's action illegal and pledged to open the Straits, but failed to do so.
- The entire Arab world was prepared to go to war, Nasser declared on May 30: "The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon are poised on the borders of Israel . . . to face the challenge, while standing behind us are the armies of Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan and the whole Arab nation.
- Approximately 250,000 troops (nearly half in Sinai), more than two thousand tanks, and seven hundred aircraft ringed Israel.
- Israel mobilized its troops to prepare to defend against a possible invasion. Because the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) is comprised of both reservists and conscripts, however, it could not keep its army mobilized indefinitely in anticipation of an Arab attack.
- President Johnson warned, "Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone."

The War Is Fought

- Faced with the threat of annihilation, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol ordered a first strike, destroying most of the Egyptian air force. After Syria attacked Tiberias and Megiddo from the Golan Heights, Israel wiped out half the Syrian air force.
- France, Israel's main arms supplier imposed an arms embargo, as did the United States.
- Israel warned Jordan's King Hussein to stay out of the war. Instead, Hussein ordered the shelling of Jerusalem from the West Bank and East Jerusalem, areas that Jordan had occupied since 1949.
- Israeli forces counterattacked in response to the Jordanian shelling, and, ultimately, unified Jerusalem and captured the West Bank (known for centuries as Judea and Samaria before Jordan renamed the area in 1950).
- By using the element of surprise, Israeli forces broke through the enemy lines after just six days of fighting and were in a position to march on Cairo, Damascus, and Amman. A cease-fire was invoked on June 10 with Israel in control of the Golan Heights, the Sinai Desert, all of Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, and Judea and Samaria (the West Bank).
- Approximately 350,000 Palestinians fled during the war. These were Jordanian citizens who moved from one part of what they considered their country to another, primarily to avoid being caught in the cross fire of a war. More than 9,000 Palestinian families separated by the war were re-united in 1967. Ultimately, more than 60,000 Palestinians returned from Jordan to the West Bank.
- The victory came at a very high cost. 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. The Arab states suffered approximately 18,000 casualties.

Post-War

- After its decisive victory, Israel offered to return the Sinai to Egypt and the Golan Heights to Syria for peace. Instead, on September 1, 1967, the Arab League summit in Khartoum, Sudan, declared the Arab position toward Israel: No Peace, No Recognition, No Negotiations.
- On November 22, 1967, the UN Security Council unanimously adopted Resolution 242, calling on Israel to withdraw from territory – not *all* the territories – captured in the war in exchange for “secure and recognized boundaries” with the aim of achieving a “peaceful and accepted settlement.”
- Egypt began shelling Israeli positions near the Suez Canal in July 1967. Nasser believed Israel could not withstand a lengthy war of attrition. Before a cease-fire was declared three years later, 1,424 Israeli soldiers and more than one hundred civilians were killed; Egypt suffered approximately five thousand dead.
- In 1968 Israel offered much of the West Bank and Gaza to Jordan for peace, but was again rejected.

- Israel built the first settlements (Jewish communities in the West Bank) for defensive purposes to reduce the possibility of a future Arab invasion. Some communities whose Jewish residents had been expelled during the 1948 War were also reestablished. Over time, the expansion of settlements became one of the most contentious political issues inside and outside of Israel.
- Israel ratified the unification of Jerusalem by annexing the city in 1980. The Golan Heights were annexed a year later.

The West Bank and Gaza Strip

- Prior to the war (1949-1967), the Palestinians never called on Jordan or Egypt to establish an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank or Gaza Strip.
- Following the war, the PLO escalated its violent campaign against Jews in Israel and abroad. They garnered international attention by heinous terror attacks that included hijacking airplanes, bombing synagogues, murdering civilians and the massacre of Israeli athletes at the 1972 Munich Olympics.
- Rejecting the idea of allowing Jordan to retake control of the West Bank, the PLO began to demand the establishment of a Palestinian state there in the mid-1970s.
- While the future of the West Bank and Gaza remained under dispute, an Israeli civil administration sought to normalize life for Palestinians in the territories by improving the economy, education, health and human services.
- Before 1967, no Palestinian universities existed in the West Bank. Israel established the first ones following the war over the objections of the Jordanian education minister who, in 1971, said, "all those who take part in planning the university are traitors and collaborators with the Israelis."
- Beginning in the 1980s, larger numbers of Jews moved to the West Bank and dozens of new settlements were established. Most Jews moved to the West Bank because of financial incentives allowing them to purchase inexpensive homes near their workplaces. Some also established communities in areas of religious significance, motivated by the belief that Judea and Samaria is part of the Promised Land. Today, the built up areas of all settlements cover roughly two percent of the West Bank.

The Search for Peace

- Initially, Israel sought a peace agreement with Jordan involving some confederation with the West Bank; however, the Palestinians insisted the PLO was their "sole legitimate representative" and Jordan's King Hussein abandoned the idea of regaining control of the area.
- In 1979, Israel signed a peace treaty with Egypt, returning the Sinai and evacuating thousands of settlers from the area.
- During talks with Egypt, Israel offered the Palestinians autonomy – a likely route to statehood – but PLO leader Yasser Arafat rejects the idea and refuses to enter negotiations.

Violence and Negotiations

- In 1987, a four-year violent uprising (Intifada) instigated by Palestinian groups in the West Bank and Gaza during which 277 Israelis and nearly 2,000 Palestinians were killed.
- In 1993, Israel agreed to recognize the PLO after chairman Yasser Arafat met the conditions of recognizing Israel's right to exist, renouncing terrorism, and committing to resolve outstanding issues through negotiations.
- In 1993, secret negotiations in Oslo, Norway, led to a series of cooperative agreements between Israel and the Palestinians, and Israel's withdrawal from most of the Gaza Strip and 40 percent of the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority was created to oversee most administrative functions in the territories and, ultimately, to govern 98% of the Palestinian population.
- Suicide bombings by Palestinian terrorist groups like Hamas and the 1995 assassination of Yitzhak Rabin by an Israeli Jew shocked Israel. Nevertheless, the peace process continued under his successors Shimon Peres and Benjamin Netanyahu.
- Despite additional territorial concessions by Israel, Palestinian violence escalated.
- In 2000, Arafat entered peace talks with Prime Minister Ehud Barak and President Bill Clinton. Barak offered to withdraw from 97% of the West Bank, 100% of Gaza, dismantle most settlements, and allow East Jerusalem to become the capital of the first Palestinian state in history. Arafat rejected the deal without making a counterproposal.
- By 2000, nearly 200,000 Jews lived in the West Bank. This did not stop Arafat from entering negotiations or Barak from offering land for peace.
- Instead of pursuing peace, Arafat instigated a second intifada, which lasted five years and was marked by heinous suicide bomb attacks. After more than 1,000 Israelis were murdered, Israel built a security barrier and checkpoints to protect its citizens. These measures made Palestinian lives more difficult, but saved Israeli lives, reducing casualties from terror attacks by more than 90%.
- In Durban, South Africa, in 2002, a UN meeting of NGOs launched an international campaign to delegitimize Israel in the hope of ultimately bringing about its destruction. This anti-Semitic boycott, divestment, sanctions (BDS) movement spread around the world. It has done little harm to Israel, but has hurt Palestinian workers and undermined the cause of peace.
- Hoping to advance peace, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon decided in 2005 to unilaterally withdraw all troops and citizens from the Gaza Strip and four communities in the West Bank.
- Instead of getting peace in exchange for land in the Gaza Strip, Palestinian terrorists continued their attacks and bombarded Israel with thousands of rockets and mortars.
- In 2007, Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip from the Palestinian Authority. The radical Islamist terrorist group's expressed goal is the destruction of Israel. Incessant terror and rocket attacks provoked Israel to launch three operations to defend its citizens between 2008 and 2014.

- Gaza was blockaded by Israel and Egypt to prevent Hamas from smuggling weapons and materials that might be used in future terror attacks, while still allowing humanitarian aid to reach the people of Gaza. Hamas has rejected international conditions – renouncing terrorism, recognizing Israel's right to exist, and abiding by past agreements – to end its isolation and build a better future for Palestinians in Gaza.
- After losing control of Gaza, PA President Mahmoud Abbas could not assure Israel he was capable of upholding any agreement he might sign. Nevertheless, during 2007-2008, Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert met more than 30 times with Abbas and, again, offered to give up virtually the entire West Bank to establish a Palestinian state. Abbas rejected the deal.
- President Barack Obama launched a peace initiative in 2009 predicated on an Israeli settlement freeze, which the Palestinians had never demanded before. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu agreed to a 10-month freeze, but this failed to satisfy Abbas.
- Abbas chose to circumvent direct talks by seeking international recognition of a Palestinian state and pressuring Israel to capitulate to Palestinian demands.
- The PA continues to incite and reward violence against Israelis. More than 7% of the Palestinian Authority's budget is allocated to pay terrorists in Israeli jails, their families and the families of Palestinians killed in terrorist attacks.
- While the conflict continues, over 100,000 Palestinians enter Israel to work every day and thousands more are employed in settlements. Israel has also undertaken measures to boost the Palestinian economy, improve conditions for the Palestinian people and create a more favorable environment for peace talks.
- Donald Trump became president of the U.S. in 2017 and traveled to Israel on his first foreign trip. He expressed the intention of working with all the parties in the region to achieve a peace agreement.
- Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf States have a common interest with Israel to confront the threat of Iran's regime. Israel and the United States are seeking to capitalize on this opportunity by improving relations and working towards a comprehensive peace agreement.

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