

The Legacy and Consequences of the June 1967 War
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Forty years have passed since the June 1967 Arab-Israeli War. The legacies are many. Israel won the war, but could not impose peace. Arab states lost the war and felt like they were victorious. The UN proved inept at preventing the war or in establishing peace. Neither the Soviet Union nor the U.S. wanted war and both avoided a direct confrontation.

The war was the beginning of the end of pan-Arabism: two Arab generations with billions of oil dollars later, chafed under the humiliating inability of their leaders to do away with Israel. Some Arab states once unified in their opposition to a Jewish state in the Middle East now recognize its reality. Meanwhile from the war, Israelis and her supporters world wide derived a sense of the Jewish state's consolidation.

Like it or not, the war tossed Israelis and the Palestinians into each others' proximate laps. Only recently, after years of violence, have Israelis concluded they can not rule the Palestinian population under their control. The area west of the Jordan River unified by the June War is now being divided. Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza remains the first step in that possible diplomatic outcome.

Palestinians, who once enjoyed unqualified Arab support to destroy Israel now need Arab states to help them set aside debilitating fragmentation and domestic violence. Will they be capable of finding consensus to manage a state structure? Consequences of the 1967 War remain open-ended.

The June War was not expected, planned or wanted. "Nasser would have to be irrational to invade" Israel, remarked then American Secretary of State Dean Rusk to Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban at the time. Arab states were not ready for war with Israel, and Israel did not want war either. Nasser, the champion of pan-Arabism, positioned hatred of Israel at the core of the drive to war. He pushed Jordan's King Hussein and Syria into war. Ultimately Egypt lost Sinai and the Gaza Strip; Jordan, the West Bank and Jerusalem; and Syria, the Golan Heights. Not since the World War I period, when the territorial boundaries were made, were lands shuffled about in such a profound way.

In this military poker game, Egypt, Jordan, and Syria gambled and lost their lands. They promised to destroy Israel; sourly they failed. Instead they were humiliated. Israel was no longer in control of a small wedge of land along the Mediterranean Sea; its narrow neck was no longer a mere eleven miles wide. In six days, it grew from 8,000 square miles to more than 38,000 square miles. For the next forty years, these Arab states and the Palestinians tried diplomacy, war, terrorism, and international coercion to have Israel leave these territories; Israel would only exchange these lands for a promise of peace and a measure of security.

Rearrangement of the territorial deck chairs drove the United States and the international community to devise a framework for Arab-Israeli negotiations, sanctioned by the UN Security Council in November 1967. United Nations Resolution 242 became the entry point, framework, and basis for potential Arab-Israeli negotiations. It called for "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict;... [and] termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgment of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force." With so much distrust and hatred between Israel and Arab parties, it took time before the UN Resolution was utilized. From the war the term "peace process" eventually emerged. The goal of negotiations: trade Arab lands for either peace or security for Israel. The United States became the bridge builder, choreographer, engineer, mediator, and negotiator of record; sometimes presidents did it well, other times not at all. Egypt in 1979 and Jordan 1994 accepted Israel's existence. No matter how hard the PLO might have tried, swallowing 242 meant accepting Israel; forsaking the dream of liberating all of Palestine was not completely dropped. What the forty years of post-war diplomacy have revealed is that Arab states will make agreements with Israel to

save their regimes national interests.

Resounding defeat for Arab armies in the Six-Day War acted as a catalyst for Palestinian national identity. However, over the next 40 years, Palestinians learned that Arab leaders had limitations when it came to defending the Palestinian cause; none were willing to die on a sword for Palestine. “We are finished with Palestine,” Egyptian General Gemasy told his Israeli counterpart in the days after the October 1973 War ended. With almost four decades of leadership dominated by Yasir Arafat, opportunities to reach agreements with Israel were ignored; coupled with the legacy of his autocratic leadership, power-hungry cronies, grand theft from the public purse, and failure to build political institutions, Arafat’s death bestowed severe fragmentation on the Palestinian Arab political landscape. By any objective measurement, the Palestinians today are economically weaker, politically more fragmented, sociologically more divided than they were forty years ago. Palestinian politics today are laced with an extremist Islamic strand where hostilities are directed more often at their own brethren, than at Israelis or surrounding regimes.

What about Israel and the Six-Day War? There is no doubt that the June 1967 War was one that the Israeli leadership of Levi Eshkol tried desperately to avoid. Defense Minister Moshe Dayan did not want to open a front either with Jordan or with Syria. Israel had no intention of wanting to control the West Bank. However, that changed with Arab self-deception that their armies were prepared to destroy Israel.

Divided for the previous 19 years, Jerusalem became unified. Israelis did not know what to do with their new territorial acquisitions; they could not exploit their stunning military successes, because Arab states simply did not want to recognize Israel’s legitimacy. When Arab states refused to negotiate, recognize, or make peace with Israel, Israelis were left to their own decisions about what to do with the territories. In the absence of negotiations, the path was made for Israelis to reconstitute the notion of settling the land of Israel; settlements began in a political vacuum. Likewise, Israelis and their governmental leaders simply did not understand that their actions in the newly-conquered lands of the West Bank and Gaza—the building of settlements—would have a vastly negative, if not searing, impact upon the local Palestinian population. Israel spent more than \$60 billion in the territories taken in the June War, deflecting huge sums of money for social and economic needs inside what had once been pre-1967 Israel.

For the second time in two decades Arab states had not defeated Israel. Israel went on to create an economy with a gross domestic product of over \$100 billion. Israel proved its staying power; regrettably, the Palestinians did not yet achieve statehood status, and much of that due to their own leadership and disdain held for them by other Arabs. Forty years later we have learned the Middle East is much more complex than just the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; it is a region fraught with sectarianism, ethnicity, oil wealth, resurgent Islamic political identities, international and regional disputes that pertain to borders, resources, water, ideology, and who rules tomorrow. Forty years ago, on the eve of the June 1967 war, the issues were simpler, the adversaries well known, and the ideologies clear. Not so today.

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