

# The Six Day War

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## **Israel Becomes a Nation**

In April of 1947, the British relinquished their power over Palestine. The Jews and Arabs had been in a power-struggle, conflicting over who would control Palestine.

To ease the fighting between the Arab and Jewish forces, the UN formed UNSCOP- an eleven-nation committee, which stands for the UN special committee for Palestine. With such a large and diverse committee, it became harder to decide exactly who should control Palestine. The only agreement that UNSCOP could agree upon was granting “independence” by the UN; however, with UN supervision throughout the area. Seven out of the eleven members of the UNSCOP decided to partition Palestine, dividing it into a Jewish state, an Arab state, and a UN trusteeship over Jerusalem.

The UN voted in favor of partitioning Palestine, but Britain refused to vote. The partition did not pass. Britain planned to leave Palestine on May 15, 1948. The Arabs wanted all of Palestine to be to be an Arab state so they prepared war. On May 14, 1948 three resolutions were approved:

1. To support a security council truce initiative
2. To name a mediator to work with the five-member UN truce commission to preserve peace
3. To protect the many holy places in Jerusalem in the event of war.

The Jewish delegation declared its own state in Palestine, called Israel. It is then that President Truman recognized the state of Israel.

## Hostilities Between the Arabs and Israel

Many people are under the impression that the series of wars between Israel and the Arab nations first began in 1967, during the Six Day War. Several sources believe that the wars initiated in 1948, when Israel became a nation. In actuality, this feud has been going on for thousands of years. At the time when Israel became a nation, many Arabs believed that this should not have happened. While they were furious, the Arabs did not show their anger strongly enough to provoke the Israeli's. Their blood was already boiling.

In 1956, Gamel Abdel-Nasser was elected President of Egypt. Nasser gained power through his military career. Shortly after he was elected, Britain and the United States withdrew their financial support from his Aswan High Dam project, a dam across the Nile River in southern Egypt. In order to obtain funds to complete the dam, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal. Israel, in alliance with France and Britain, were furious with this action. The United Nations Emergency Force placed troops on the border between Egypt and Israel to prevent an outbreak of disorder. This decision by the UN acted as a separation between the countries. In May of 1967, the UN withdrew its troops, leaving the borders open.

Hostilities between Israel and the Arab nations had been at a high point for years with the Arab nations refusing to acknowledge Israel as a Jewish state. Nasser called for the complete destruction of Israel.

Terrorist attacks waged upon Israel increased to the time of the war. Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli shipping and all ships headed for Eilat on May 22. This blockade cut off Israel's only supply route with Asia; and, stopped the flow of oil from its main supplier, Iran. The blockade violated a convention adopted by the UN in 1958. The United States government and other nations from around the world declared Nasser's blockade illegal.

On May 30, Jordan joined the Egyptian and Syrian military alliance of 1966. Under the command of Egypt, Jordan placed its armies on both side of the Egyptian river. Iraq soon followed, agreeing to send reinforcements and issued a warning order to two brigades. Algeria and Kuwait followed suit. A massive Arab military force confronted Israel.

A direct threat along the whole length of Israel's territory was created. The Voice of the Arabs proclaimed, "The sole method we shall apply against Israel is total war, which will result in the extermination of Zionist existence," (Leibler-60). Despite many futile attempts by Israel to work out peace with the Arab nations, war seemed inevitable.



*Israel prior to the war.*

## War Begins

Israel preferred to strike first because they did not want to fight on their homeland. At 0745 (7:45 Israeli time; 8:45 Egyptian time) on the morning of Monday, June 5, the first wave of Israeli air strikes occurred against Egypt.

Israel's objective was to shatter the Arab air forces while their aircraft were still on the ground. The Egyptian air force was the main Arab air force. Israel's plan required exact and detailed planning in order to be carried out successfully.

Attacking at 0745 was crucial. The Egyptian state of alert was at its peak. It was safe to assume that the Egyptians had several flights of fighter planes waiting at the end of the runway.



*Israeli troops patrol East Jerusalem*

Often, attacks are made at dawn. If Israel had attacked the next day, their pilots would have possibly gone 36 hours without sleep.

The weather played an important role in this attack. At 0800, the visibility is optimal because of the angle of the sun. The air is at its stillest, which is important for dropping bombs.

0745 Israeli time is 0845

Egyptian time. The Egyptians arrive at

work by 9 a.m. Striking 15 minutes before that time would catch officers and soldiers on their way to their daily routines.

The Israeli's had operated their plan with perfection. In less than three hours, the Egyptian Air Force had been destroyed. It no longer constituted an effective fighting force and was unable to give either cover or close support to the Egyptian Army in Sinai. Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Lebanon's air forces were also attacked. Israel's losses were minuscule in comparison with the Arabs.

With Egypt out of the way, Israel focused on the other Arab nations. Israel had asked Jordan not to join in the war. After the attack on the Egyptian Air Force, Nasser was desperate to invade Israel. He called upon King Hussein of Jordan and deceitfully asked for his help.

Hussein ordered the Jordanian army to attack the Israeli half of Jerusalem. Israel turned its attention towards Jordan. Jordan had suffered heavy damages to its air force and was unable to protect their troops. With almost total control of the skies, the Israeli planes were able to back up and protect the troops and tanks.



*Convoy of Israeli soldiers*

The Israeli Air Force prevented Jordanian reinforcements from reaching Jerusalem. The Israeli's were successful in taking control of the Western Wall. It was the first time in nearly 2000 years that Jews had controlled the wall.



The next day, the Jordanian forces were pushed back to the other side of the Jordan River. Jordan, after suffering heavy casualties, had no other option but to arrange for a cease-fire. Jordan had become the first Arab country to surrender.

The battle against Syria, Israel's most bitter enemy, lasted until the fifth day of the war. The Israeli forces reached the Suez Canal on June 8. After they had taken over Sinai, the Israeli's turned its forces on the Golan Heights, where the Syrians were shelling Israeli villages. The Israeli soldiers began the arduous assault up steep terrain against the Syrian forces the next day. The balance of power in the Golan Heights area soon shifted towards Israel and Syria surrendered.

Fighting between Israel and Egypt did not formally end for many years, although Israel controlled the Sinai Peninsula. Not until the 1979 Camp David Accords did the two countries finally reach peace.

The speed of Israel's victory was devastating to the Arabs, who had expected victory. Egypt, Jordan, and Syria lost almost all of their air forces and much of their armed weaponry. Israel's losses were few in comparison to that of the Arab forces. On November 22 the UN passed Resolution 242, which called for Israel to withdraw from the Occupied Territories; in return Arab states would recognize Israel's independence and guarantee secure borders for Israel.



## **Israel Proves Itself as a Nation**

Following the war, the Arabs and Palestinians declared that they would continue to fight Israel. Israel refused to give up the occupied territories. The Six-Day War was followed by what has come to be known as the War of Attrition. Although cease-fire agreements eventually ended this situation, the region remained volatile. Resolution 242 created the foundation of the peace process that began to yield results in the late 1970s.

The Israeli military is one of the best armies in the world. They have superior strategic planning, technologically advanced weaponry, excellent training and above all, loyal troops. The Israeli's fought alone because they were capable of taking care of themselves.

Prime Minister Eshkol's agenda was to build a strong nation. He wanted to change the agriculture, trade, but most of all, build peace between Israel and the Arabs. Eshkol believed that someday there would be peace between the two. Aside from the Arab hatred of Israeli's, the world viewed Israel with uneasiness.

## **Annotated Bibliography**

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### **Secondary Sources**

"Arab World Girds For "Second Round" Against Israel." U.S. News and World Report 10 July 1967: 27-28. This helped us better understand the feelings between the Arabs and the Jews after the war. This also told us more about how the world felt about Israel.

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Benvenisti, Meron. Intimate Enemies. Los Angeles: UP of California, 1995. This helped us better understand the harsh feeling the Arabs and Jews shared.

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