

# Six-Day War

Arab plane that has been destroyed by the Israel Army

The **Six-Day War** took place from 5 June to 10 June 1967 between [Israel](#) and a coalition of [Arab](#) states, led by [Egypt](#). Israel won the war, which has had huge effects on the future of the [Middle East](#). Israel has occupied Arab areas, such as the [West Bank](#) and the [Gaza Strip](#), ever since. That has helped cause many wars between it and the neighboring countries and has led to the exile of many [Palestinians](#).

## Background

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After the [World War I](#), [Zionist](#) ideals started to become a reality. [Jews](#) from [Europe](#) started moving to [Palestine](#) in the 1920s, when the territory was still under the [British mandate](#). The migration led to conflict with the native [Arabs](#). The foundation of the State of [Israel](#) in 1948 was not recognized by the Arab states, and its creation made [Egypt](#) go to war in 1948 and 1949 and become Israel's main enemy.

The [Suez Crisis](#) in 1956 established a [geopolitical](#) situation that failed to solve the problems in the area. The crisis made the [United Nations](#) send troops to the [Sinai Peninsula](#) to maintain the peace between Egypt and Israel. The coming to power of the [Baa'th Party](#) in Syria in 1963; the establishment of the [Palestinian Liberation Organization](#) in 1964; and the alliance of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan in 1966 contributed to the rise of tensions, which eventually led to the war.

In May 1967, Egyptian President [Gamal Abdel Nasser](#) was informed by the [Soviet Union](#) that Israel was moving its troops on its border with Syria.<sup>[\[1\]](#)[\[2\]](#)</sup> Because of that false information, Nasser decided to expel the UN troops from the Sinai Peninsula and to move his army close to the Egyptian border with Israel. In the last days of May, other [Arab](#) countries such as [Jordan](#) and [Iraq](#) gathered troops and prepared for battle. The main event that led to the beginning of the war was Egypt's closing of the Tiran Straits on 23 May 1967. This blocked Israel's only access to the [Red Sea](#).

## The War Timeline

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### Day 1: 5 June 1967

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At 7 a.m. local time, the Egyptian Air Force was taken by surprise by an aerial attack by the Israeli Air Force, and Operation Focus started. Israeli had been training the execution of its plan for a long time.<sup>[3]</sup> To avoid being detected by the Egyptian radars, Israeli fighting jets flew low and kept radio silent. Because Israel's intelligence service had gathered all the crucial information over the years, all Israeli pilots knew where to find the Egyptian airfields and the exact location of each jet. That let them know which ones were the most powerful and so could become a danger to Israel. Israeli priorities were set clearly: destroy the runways so that no Egyptian jets could escape, the long-range bombers that were a threat to Israeli cities, and finally all other air force facilities. Within just thirty minutes, Egypt has already lost more than half of its air force.<sup>[3]</sup>

After the first air attack, the ground war started in the Sinai Desert. Israeli troops moved forward quickly, but Egyptian intelligence initially told the troops stationed in the Sinai to let them pass since they believed it to be just a diversion of the actual main attack that was believed had not yet happened. That made it easy for the Israeli troops to reach the city of al-Arish well ahead of schedule, at 10 p.m.<sup>[3]</sup>

Even though Egypt had lost almost all of its air force within one day of the war, but Defence Minister Abdel Hakim Amer pushed the storyline to the Egyptian government in [Cairo](#), the country's population, and its [Arab League](#) allies that the Egyptian Army, after it had overcome the initial effect of surprise, destroyed much of the Israeli Air Force. That led to [Jordan](#) acting upon the joined defence treaty that it had signed with Egypt.<sup>[4]</sup> At 10 a.m. Jordan started firing at Israeli facilities, both military and civilian. Jordan's participation led to [Syria](#) and [Iraq](#) also participating in the war by attacking Israel from the east. Israel pushed back by attacking Jordan's air bases and bunkers around [Jerusalem](#); continuing its attack on Egypt, now from multiple directions; and quickly gaining more territory.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Day 2: 6 June 1967

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On the second day of the war, the Israeli troops captured al-Arish, the largest city of the Sinai Peninsula. The location is important since it is only 45 km from the [Gaza](#) border. Israel hoped that by splitting Gaza from the Sinai, it would make make Gaza fall more easily. Meanwhile, the air attacks by Israel continued, which led to an order by General Amer for the Egyptian troops to retreat. However, the retreat is very sudden, and the chaos led to the roads out of the Sinai being jammed with army vehicles and to troops falling prey to the Israeli jets.<sup>[3]</sup>

In the east, Syrian troops were busy firing at Israeli settlements, but the attack plan was quickly changed back to their defensive plan after continuous attacks from Israeli jets. Jordan also has to deal with Israeli air attacks, and the Israeli troops made their way closer and closer to Jerusalem. After Israeli had captureedc Ammunition Hill. in East [Jerusalem](#),

the road to the [Old City of Jerusalem](#) was safer for Israeli troops to pass through. Jordan's possession of Jerusalem and the entire [West Bank](#) felt the pressure. With the Israeli troops surrounding it, the Jordanian Army was at risk of being stranded on the West Bank. [King Hussein](#) contacted Nasser and asked whether to retreat. Nasser eventually admitted the actual damages to the Egyptian Army and advised Hussein to evacuate the Jordan Army from the West Bank. Hussein sent out his order of retreat at 11:30 p.m., but two hours later, the possibility of an official [ceasefire](#) that would be ordered by the [UN Security Council](#) made Hussein urge his troops to maintain their positions in the hope that when the ceasefire started at dawn, Jordan would still be in possession of the West Bank and the [Old City of Jerusalem](#).<sup>[3]</sup>

### Day 3: 7 June 1967

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On the third day of the war, Israeli troops hurried towards conquering the Old City before the proposed ceasefire came into effect. With less than 100 Jordanian soldiers left to defend the Old City the Israeli troops opened fire and reached the [Western Wall](#). Jordan also lost other places in the West bank like [Nablus](#), [Jericho](#), and [Bethlehem](#) to Israel.<sup>[3]</sup>

On the other front, Israel starts [Operation Lights](#), with its navy attacking the [Gulf of Suez](#) and its army successfully attacking Egyptian forces in the Straits of Tiran on land. The latter attack is successful and results in the [Red Sea](#) now being open again for Israeli ships to pass through.<sup>[3]</sup>

### Day 4: 8 June 1967

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On the fourth day of the war, Israel went further into northern Jordan. By conquering the biblical city of [Hebron](#), the war on the West Bank was over. Israel marked new border on the [Jordan River](#) .<sup>[3]</sup>

On the Sinai front, Egyptian troops were retreating towards the Mitla and Gidi Passes in the hope of crossing the Suez Canal and getting to safety on the Egyptian mainland. With the Israeli forces getting closer to the Suez Canal, Amer gave the order that all Egyptian troops must protect the Suez Canal from the west and that all passes to and bridges over the canal must be destroyed. However, that meant that retreating Egyptian troops from the Sinai could no longer cross the canal and get to safety. With the Israeli forces so close, Nasser agreed to a ceasefire.<sup>[3]</sup>

On the northern front, in the [Golan Heights](#), Syria continued firing at Israeli settlements, but most of its army waited safely in its bunkers for the ground fighting to begin. However, with the possibility of also a ceasefire between Syria and Israel, the planned operation by Israel to invade the Golan Heights was temporarily put on hold. Syria's ally, the [Soviet Union](#), warned

Israel that it should respect the pending ceasefire and that any continuing violence towards Syria could have serious results. <sup>[3]</sup>

With the strong possibility of a ceasefire at all fronts, the war seemed to be coming to an end after only four days. Israel captured the entire West Bank and even the entire Sinai Desert.

## **Day 5: 9 June 1967**

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On the fifth day of the war, Israel ordered an attack on the Golan Heights, with air attacks starting at 9:40am and shortly afterward overland attacks from multiple angles. However, the terrain of the Golan Heights is hard to manage and navigate for those who are not used to it, which slowed the Israeli Army and led its troops right into the arms of the Syrian Army. By 6 p.m., three Syrian military fords had fallen, but for Israel, that had taken many lives and the loss of much material. Also, its troops had gotten only up to 13 km into Syrian territory. On the other hand, the Syrian troops were aside from their frontline and so were still in quite good shape. The Syrian government was determined to reinforce those frontline troops as fast as possible and asked for reinforcement from its Arab allies, especially from its treaty partner Egypt, but there was no response from the Egyptian government. <sup>[3]</sup>

Meanwhile in Egypt, Nasser held a speech on live television that took full responsibility for losing the war. Nasser announced his plan to step down as president and names a new president, Zakaria Mohieddin. Immediately after his speech, a spontaneous mass protest started in Cairo and asked Nasser to stay. Protests in other large cities around the [Middle East](#) also happened. King Hussein of Jordan even wrote to Nasser to ask him to stay, and Mohieddin publicly rejected the offered presidency. That led to Nasser deciding to stay as president and accepting the resignation of all of his generals who had fought during the war like Amer. <sup>[3]</sup>

## **Day 6: 10 June 1967**

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The fighting in the Golan Heights between Israel and Syria continued into the night. Israel was in a rush to capture the entire Golan Heights area before the ceasefire with Syria actually began. At 8:30 a.m., on the sixth and final day of the war, the Syrian commanders were losing control over their own troops. Syrian troops started blowing up their own bunkers and destroying all confidential documents. The city of [Quneitra](#), only 75 km from [Damascus](#), was reached by the Israeli troops. The Syrian government then decided to give the order for all troops to retreat and to reposition themselves around the capital. <sup>[3]</sup>

In the meantime, the Soviet Union kept its word by cutting all diplomatic relations with Israel, and nine other communist bloc countries did so as well.

Israel, afraid of possible military intervention by the Soviets, asked the [United States](#) for help, but no response was given by the [White House](#). The Israeli government gave four more hours to the northern troops before it accepts the ceasefire since it still hoped to capture all of the Golan Heights. At 12:30 p.m., Quneitra was taken and then all of the rest of the Golan Heights was conquered, including [Mount Hermon](#), the highest point in Syria. Only then was a ceasefire with Syria agreed upon by Israel. The war has come to an end.<sup>[3]</sup>

## Military preparations

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### Background

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The Egyptians had 50 [runways](#) and about 960 [attack aircraft](#), and the Israelis had 300 attack aircraft. Before the war, Israeli pilots and ground soldiers had trained to make possible for one aircraft to go into mission even four times a day; the Arab air forces could complete only one or two missions a day. That let the Israeli Air Force start many attacks against Egypt on the first day of the war, destroy the Egyptian Air Force when it was still on the ground, and defeat the other Arab countries' air forces on the same day. The Arabs were so surprised that they wrongly believed that Israel had been helped by other countries, especially the United States.

On May 26, 1967, the [Central Intelligence Agency](#) stated, "The Israelis... If they attack now they... would still be able to drive the Egyptians away from the entrance to the Strait of Tiran, but it would certainly cost them heavy losses of men and matériel". A few days before the war, Israel believed it could win a war in 3 to 4 days. The Americans and the [British](#) believed that would take 7 to 10 days.

### Armies

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The Israeli Army had 264,000 soldiers, but not all of them were called to fight. Israel used about 40,000 troops and 200 tanks. The Israeli Central Command forces had five brigades. The first two (the Jerusalem Brigade and the Harel Brigade) were near Jerusalem. Mordechai Gur's 55th Brigade was called from the Sinai front. The 10th Armored Brigade was in the north of the West Bank.

On the other side, Egypt prepared 100,000 of its 160,000 soldiers in the Sinai, including all of its seven divisions (four infantry, two armoured, and one mechanized), four independent infantry brigades, and four independent armoured brigades. Some of them were veterans of Egypt's participation to the Yemen Civil War. and others were reservists.

## Weapons

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Arabs used mainly Soviet weapons, but Jordan also had American weapons and an air force of British aircraft. Egypt had the largest and the most modern of all the Arab air forces, with 420 combat aircraft; all of them had been given by the Soviets. Egypt also had [MiG-21s](#) and 30 [Tu-16 "Badger"](#) medium bombers, which were very powerful and dangerous for the enemy.

## Aftermath

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Israel won the war after 983 people had been killed, and many tanks and aircraft had been destroyed. On the opposite side, Egypt lost 15.000 soldiers, Jordan 700 and Syria 2500. With its victory, Israel gained many territories: the whole Sinai Peninsula, the [Gaza Strip](#), and the [West Bank](#) (including [East Jerusalem](#) and the [Golan Heights](#)). That also meant that Israel now ruled and governed one million Arabs, which led to the forced displacement of most of them soon after the war.<sup>[5]</sup>

The victory of Israel had many different meanings. It was a defeat for the Arab countries but also for the Soviets, who had helped Egypt to maintain its power in the Middle East.<sup>[6]</sup> More importantly, Israel had confirmed its supremacy in the region and proved very powerful despite its small size. Feelings of enthusiasm and optimism spread inside and outside the country and convinced many Jews to migrate to Israel. Across the Arab world, violence rose against the Jewish communities. The war also resulted in a change of strategy for the [Palestinian Liberation Organization](#), which had been founded in 1964 but only now became military active.

In an interview in late June 1967, [David Ben-Gurion](#), a former prime minister of Israel, affirmed that his country would have accepted to give back the occupied territories in exchange for a definite peace treaty and its recognition of the by the Arab countries.<sup>[6]</sup> Nasser and other Arab leaders decided not to accept those conditions. Their choice against further negotiations led to another conflict just a few years later, in 1973,<sup>[7]</sup> called the [Yom Kippur War](#). Israel won once again, but the war did not bring much change to the borders that had been on the ground since 1967. Eventually, Israel returned the [Sinai Peninsula](#) to Egypt in 1982 but kept the lands it had acquired from Jordan. The UN requested Israel to retreat to the pre-1967 borders and to help form an Arab-Palestinian state, but negotiations and intermittent fighting continued, and the tensions with Palestinians in the territories occupied by Israel have never been solved.



# References

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# Other websites

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- "The Six Days War". *History Learning Site*. HistoryLearningSite.co.uk. Retrieved 5 February 2015.

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