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1967 war: Six days that changed the Middle East By Jeremy BowenBBC Middle East editor  
  
Published 5 June 2017  
  
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Fifty years ago, war broke out between Israel and its neighbours. The conflict lasted just six days but its effect would last to the present day. At the end of 1948, Israel's Arab neighbours had invaded to try to destroy the new state, and failed. The Egyptian army had been beaten, but a force surrounded in a piece of land known as the Falluja pocket refused to surrender. A group of young Egyptian and Israeli officers tried to break the impasse. Among them was Yitzhak Rabin, a 26-year-old Israeli military prodigy who was head of operations on the southern front, and the 30-year-old Egyptian Major Gamal Abdel Nasser. Just a few years after the Nazis had killed six million Jews, the dream of establishing a state in their biblical homeland had come true. Palestinians call 1948 "al-Nakba", or "the Catastrophe". Up to 750,000 Palestinians fled or were expelled from the land that became Israel, and were never allowed back. For the Arabs, defeat at the hands of the fledgling Israeli state was a seismic political moment that led to years of upheaval.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Nasser became a hero in the Arab world in the wake of the Suez crisis Feeling betrayed, humiliated army officers seized power. Syria had regular military coups. Four years after the end of the war, Nasser led a group of young officers who overthrew the king of Egypt. By 1956, Nasser was president. In the same year, he defied Britain, France and Israel in the Suez crisis, and became the hero and leader of the Arab world. In Israel, Rabin continued his military career. By 1967, he was chief-of-staff, the most senior officer. Arabs could not get over the pain of defeat; the Israelis never forgot that their neighbours tried to destroy them. Both sides knew that another war would come, sooner or later. Bad neighbours Israel and its Arab neighbours had plenty of reasons for hatred or mutual suspicion. But the Cold War in the 1950s and 1960s added extra fuel. The Soviet Union provided Egypt with a modern air force. Israel had warm relations with the United States, but it was not yet the biggest recipient of American military aid; in the 1960s Israel also bought aircraft from France and tanks from Britain.  
  
What the war meant to Israelis and Arabs The friendship that grew out of war What makes Jerusalem so holy Why aren't the Israelis and Palestinians talking?  
  
After 1948 Israel had worked endlessly to make the best of its exposed strategic position. It also absorbed more than one million immigrants - military service was an important part of making the new arrivals into Israelis. Israel built a speedy, flexible and deadly military. And by 1967 it was close to acquiring its own nuclear weapons.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Yitzhak Rabin (left) was Israel's chief of staff by 1967 The new, native-born Israelis, known as "sabras" - the Hebrew word for prickly pear - were determined not to repeat what they believed had been the mistakes of Jews in the diaspora. They would always fight back, and sometimes fight first. Rabin was confident that Israel's armed forces were in good shape. Their mission was to win every war, on the grounds that Israel could not afford a single defeat. Egyptian forces and those of its ally Syria, trained less, boasted more and forgot that the political victory that emerged after the 1956 Suez crisis was preceded by a military defeat. Nasser concentrated on building a pan-Arab nationalist movement that his supporters fully expected would recreate Arab greatness, and exact revenge on Israel. He made his closest ally, Field Marshal Abdul Hakim Amer, commander-in-chief of the armed forces.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Abdul Hakim Amir was the commander of Egypt's armed forces Egypt was an ancient country without the sense of insecurity that underlay Israel's swagger. Amer's most important mission, which he did very well, was to make sure that the army stayed loyal by stamping out plots and keeping the officer corps happy. The military arts were much less of a priority. By 1967, Egypt was bogged down in a war in Yemen that had become its own Vietnam. It had not fought well. But Nasser could not replace Amer with a better soldier. The Syrian army was equally politicised, and like Egypt was a client of the Soviet Union. A series of generals were rotated into power by a series of coups d'état. Arabs talked a lot about unity, socialism and nationalism, but in reality they were deeply disunited. The Syrian and Egyptian leaderships fretted about plots allegedly instigated by the monarchies in Jordan and Saudi Arabia. Kings worried that the military populists who led Syria and Egypt would incite revolution. Jordan's ruler, King Hussein, was a close ally of Britain and the US. Jordan was the only Arab state that emerged from 1948 as a winner.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, King Hussein of Jordan Hussein's grandfather, King Abdullah, had secret contacts with the Jewish Agency, the main body representing Jews in British Mandate Palestine; they discussed carving up the land between them in the wake of Britain's planned departure in 1948. In 1951 a Palestinian nationalist assassinated Abdullah at the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Fifteen-year-old Prince Hussein saw his grandfather die, and the next day carried a gun for the first time. A year later he was king. After the 1948 war, Jordan and Israel came close, but not close enough, to making peace. Secret talks continued into Hussein's reign. He was aware of Jordan's weaknesses - it was mainly desert and had a large and restive population of Palestinian refugees. Syrian syndrome War in 1967 came as a result of years of increasing tension and vicious border skirmishes between Arabs and Israelis. The border between Egypt and Israel was relatively quiet. The biggest flashpoint was Israel's northern border with Syria, where they fought over disputed territory and Syria's attempts to divert the River Jordan away from Israel's national water grid. The Syrians sheltered Palestinian guerrillas, who were mounting raids into Israel. Western powers had no doubt which side in the Middle East was stronger on the eve of war in 1967. The US military's Joint Chiefs of Staff judged "that Israel will be militarily unchallengeable by any combination of Arab states at least during the next five years." In a report on the Israeli army in January 1967, the British defence attaché in Tel Aviv assessed that "in command, training, equipment and services the Israel army is more prepared for war than ever before. Well-trained, tough, self-reliant, the Israeli soldier has a strong fighting spirit and would willingly go to war in defence of his country." The border wars stoked the tension. Palestinian guerrillas broke through the border fence. Israel condemned them as terrorists; it believed that to deter and punish, it had to hit back hard.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Jerusalem, 1965 A big Israeli raid into the Jordanian-occupied West Bank targeting the village of Samua in November 1966, followed a land mine attack inside Israel. The raid caused uproar among Palestinians in the West Bank. Hussein was aghast. He told the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) that for three years he had been in secret talks with Israel; his Israeli contacts had sent him assurances there would be no reprisals on the morning of the raid. The Americans were sympathetic. They supported a resolution at the UN Security Council condemning the Samua raid. Hussein imposed martial law on the West Bank and became more convinced than ever that his throne was in jeopardy, and that he could be overthrown by angry Palestinians. He feared a coup by radical pro-Nasser officers in the army that Israel could use as a pretext to swallow the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The king did not want to share the fate of the other Hashemite monarch in the Middle East, his cousin and friend King Faisal of Iraq. He had been shot in the yard of his palace in a military coup in 1958. The march to war continued with escalating trouble on the Israel-Syrian border. Unlike Hussein, who the Americans believed was doing all he could to stop Palestinian infiltration, Syria actively encouraged it; Israel was pushing its claims to disputed territory in the border area aggressively by cultivating fields in demilitarised areas with armoured tractors. It came to a head with a full-scale air and artillery battle between Israel and Syria on 7 April, 1967. Israel routed the Syrians. The next morning young Palestinians in Jerusalem, according to British diplomats, showed "a stunned awe at the Israeli competence and Arab helplessness in the face of it" and they asked "where were the Egyptians?" Pressure was growing on Nasser to add action to his talk. Israel basked in a mood of national self-congratulation. But some elder statesmen and soldiers were alarmed. In a corridor in the Israeli parliament (the Knesset), the military's former chief-of-staff Moshe Dayan bumped into General Ezer Weizmann, the former head of the air force and now Rabin's number two. "Are you out of your minds?" Dayan said. "You're leading the country to war!"  
  
Image source, Alamy  
  
Image caption, Moshe Dayan pushed for a quick attack Syria, and the Palestinian guerrillas it sponsored, tried even harder to provoke the Israelis, who obliged them by rising to every provocation. It looked to Syria and Egypt, as well as to Britain and the US, that Israel was planning a bigger move. An exaggerated news agency report, quoting "a high Israeli source" said that Israel "would take limited military action designed to topple the Damascus army regime if Syrian terrorists continued sabotage raids inside Israel". The source was Brigadier General Aharon Yariv, the head of military intelligence. He mentioned toppling the regime only as the most extreme of a range of possibilities. But the report was taken seriously in Syria - and also in the Israeli press. Then an intervention by the Soviet Union changed everything. On 13 May, Moscow delivered a warning to Cairo that Israel was massing troops on the border with Syria and would attack within a week. Why exactly the Soviet Union fired the starting pistol for war has been debated ever since. Two Israeli historians, Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, argue that the USSR deliberately instigated the crisis; they say it wanted to block Israel's nuclear weapons plans; and that the Soviets were ready to commit their own forces to the fight. At the time a "medium-level" Soviet official told the CIA that the Soviet Union was stirring up the Arabs to try to make trouble for the US. With the big problems in Vietnam, another war in the Middle East would be an even worse headache. In 1967 neither Israel nor its Arab neighbours needed much encouragement. They plunged straight into the crisis that they had all expected for years. Nasser the gambler Twenty-four hours after the Soviet warning, Egypt's supreme commander, Field Marshal Amer, put the army on full alert for war. Lieutenant General Anwar al-Qadi, the chief of operations, told Amer that more than half of the army, including some of its best troops, was bogged down in Yemen; it was in no condition to fight Israel. Amer reassured him that fighting was not part of the plan; it was just a "demonstration" in response to Israel's threats to Syria. Two days later Egypt dug itself deeper into crisis. It expelled UN peacekeepers that had patrolled the border with Israel since 1956, and moved troops into the Sinai desert.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, UN peacekeepers in Sinai and Gaza were expelled by Egypt The Israeli army, still obsessed with Syria, was much more patient with Egypt at first. Shlomo Gazit, who was head of analysis in military intelligence, told American diplomats that Israel had been taken by surprise by Egypt's belligerency, but it was "an elaborate charade", that would only get serious if Egypt blockaded the port of Eilat on the Red Sea by closing the Straits of Tiran. The mood was whipped up by Nasser's ubiquitous radio station, Sawt al-Arab, the Voice of the Arabs. Broadcasting from Cairo to the rest of the Middle East, it was a vital tool of Nasser's foreign policy. Throughout the crisis, its chief announcer, Ahmed Said, read out a series of blood-curdling threats to Israel. The Israelis did not call Nasser's bluff when he threw out the UN peacekeepers and sent more troops into the Sinai. So he doubled the stakes. On 22 May, he banned Israeli shipping from the Straits of Tiran, the entrance to the Gulf of Aqaba, effectively re-imposing the blockade of the port of Eilat that had been lifted in 1956. At an airbase in the Sinai desert Nasser announced: "If Israel wishes to threaten war, we tell her, you are welcome." A photo shows Nasser, looking as debonair as ever, surrounded by happy young flyers. Smiles flashed across the grainy black and white still. The image Nasser desired was pumped around the world - the leader of the Arabs challenging the Jewish state, surrounded by the symbols of a modern fighting force - jet pilots - ready for action. Nasser looks excited, almost like a child intoxicated by the enormity of the line he had just crossed.  
  
Image caption, Nasser pictured with Egyptian jet pilots at Bir Gifgafa air base in Sinai, 22 May 1967 The Americans responded 42 minutes after the announcement from Cairo, dangling the prospect of a visit by the US Vice-President Hubert Humphrey if the crisis was averted. President Lyndon Johnson was angry. The UN Secretary General U Thant was in the air, flying to Cairo on a peace mission when Nasser made his new threat. Nasser repeated the promise he had already made to the Americans and the Soviets, that Egypt would not fire the first shot. But U Thant concluded gloomily that unless a way could be found around the blockade of Eilat, war was certain. Pressure to strike The day after Nasser closed the Straits, the Israeli prime minister, Levi Eshkol, and the cabinet ordered a full mobilisation. In 48 hours, 250,000 men could be put into the field. After compulsory military service, all Israeli men were allocated to a reserve unit. In a couple of days, most Israeli men under the age of 50 were in some sort of military uniform. The pressure was crushing General Rabin. Against all the military evidence, he had convinced himself that he was leading Israel to catastrophe. Rabin smoked pack after pack of cigarettes and eventually suffered a nervous collapse. He slept for nearly 24 hours, recovered himself, and went back to work. International diplomacy attempted to settle the crisis before it descended into full-scale war. Israel's foreign minister, Abba Eban, flew to Washington for an urgent meeting with President Johnson. In 1956, when Israel attacked Egypt as part of a secret agreement with Britain and France, the Americans branded Israel an aggressor, and forced it to pull out of the land it conquered. This time Eban wanted Johnson's consent for Israel's fight. The US president warned Israel not to fire the first shot. He told Eban not to worry about an Egyptian attack. It wasn't imminent and if it came "you'll whip the hell out of them".  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, US President Lyndon B Johnson warned the Israelis not to fire the first shot Johnson indicated he would work on ways of getting the Straits of Tiran open, perhaps with a multinational naval task force, but wanted time to see if it could work. Abba Eban decided Israel would have to move at America's pace, but the army was ready to attack and the generals were getting frustrated. Eban irritated the military men. His overblown style and metropolitan ways got under their skin. The generals were furious when the cabinet agreed on 28 May to wait two weeks. For them it was about much more than the Straits of Tiran. What mattered was the big picture. Nasser was uniting the entire Arab world against them. He had moved divisions into the Sinai desert, making a direct threat to Israel's borders. Jordan's dilemma Nasser had been the undisputed leader of the Arab world since 1956. Now standing up to the hated Israelis, his position among Arabs as a political idol was reinforced. He held a news conference with foreign journalists in Cairo on 28 May, in which he linked the crisis in the Sinai and the Straits of Tiran with Israel's "aggression" towards the Palestinians. Coexistence was not possible because Israel, he said, had robbed and expelled the Palestinians in 1948. Israel would also get what was coming for threatening "to march on Damascus, occupy Syria and overthrow the Syrian Arab regime". Nasser's confidence forced King Hussein of Jordan into a corner. Hussein did not trust Nasser. He confided in the CIA station chief in Amman, Jack O'Connel, who had become a close confidant, that he was convinced the West Bank was Israel's strategic target. Hussein's senior officers were pressing for closer co-ordination with Nasser.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, 30 May 1967: Hussein and Nasser smile after signing a Jordan-Egypt defence agreement For Hussein it all came down to survival. He decided on reconciliation with Nasser. He believed that if he stayed out of the war "an eruption" among his Palestinian subjects might cause his regime to collapse. If he fought, Egyptian air cover might delay Israel's advance into the West Bank long enough for the UN to impose a ceasefire. On 30 May, King Hussein flew to Cairo and did the deal. When he returned to Amman deliriously happy crowds tried to lift up his Mercedes so they could carry it back to the palace. Hussein was not deluded. The crowds loved him because Nasser had accepted him, not the other way around. Later he told the historian Avi Shlaim: "I knew that war was inevitable. I knew that we were going to lose. I knew that we in Jordan were threatened, threatened by two things: we either followed the course we did, or alternatively the country could tear itself apart if we stayed out." Fear and threats If they could fight on their own terms, Israel's generals were confident they would score an overwhelming victory. But strict military censorship kept those conclusions private. At the same time, bloody threats poured out of Arab radio stations and on to the pages of Israeli newspapers. Only 22 years after the end of the Holocaust it was not surprising that the Arab propaganda hit home. A doom-laden mood overcame the country. People made black jokes: "Let's meet after the war. Where? In a phone box," alluding to how many Israelis might be left.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Civil defence preparations in Tel Aviv, June 1967 The government stockpiled coffins; rabbis consecrated parks as emergency cemeteries; tens of thousands of pints of blood were donated. The mood was not helped when Prime Minister Levi Eshkol made a disastrous broadcast to the nation on 28 May. He stammered and fluffed his way through it. At a meeting afterwards Israel's generals gave him a vicious dressing-down. Among many interventions, Brig Gen Ariel Sharon raged "we have removed our principal weapon, fear of us". Several of the commanders used aggressive, highly pejorative language comparing the government to Jewish leaders in the diaspora who had been forced to beg like slaves. Native-born Israelis in the 1950s and 60s were brought up to reject what they assumed was the weakness and passivity of European Jews who did not fight when the Nazis came. To the young Israeli generals, mainly native-born, mostly in their 30s and 40s, Eshkol, who liked speaking Russian and Yiddish as much as Hebrew, seemed to embody the weakness of the diaspora. That was unfair - he had arrived in Palestine as a young man and had spent his life building the state.  
  
Image source, Alamy  
  
Image caption, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol was mistrusted by younger Israeli generals Brig Gen Elad Peled, one of four divisional commanders, was at the meeting. Peled told me in 2002: "The mental generation gap was very important. We were the cowboys, frontier people. We looked at the older generation as people who were not free, they were not liberated… the minister of education asked me 'what if you're wrong? You're playing with the existence of the state.' I told him I am 100% confident about the result of the war." Like many Israeli prime ministers, Eshkol was also minister of defence. He was forced to give the job up, in favour of one of Israel's war heroes, the swashbuckling, one-eyed general, Moshe Dayan. The soldier had stated his essential philosophy at the funeral of Ray Rothberg, who was killed at a kibbutz near Gaza in 1956. "It is the fate of our generation that our life requires that we be always prepared and armed, strong and determined, for if the sword be struck from our grasp, we shall die." Eve of war Nasser was gambling for high stakes. Egypt had a modern air force but the army was weak. His generals were well-aware that Nasser's brinkmanship had taken them to the edge of a disastrous war. International attempts to defuse the crisis had failed. The only idea the Americans and the British had was the so-called Red Sea Regatta, the proposed naval task force that would force open the Straits of Tiran. But the US and British admirals and politicians hated the idea. They worried it might not work, and that they would be handing Nasser another victory. On Friday 2 June, Israel's generals put the definitive case for war to the cabinet defence committee. They told the politicians that they could beat Egypt, but the longer they had to wait the harder it would be. A few days earlier Meir Amit, the head of Israel's spy agency Mossad, had travelled to Washington DC on a false passport, in disguise. He did not want to wait longer for war; he was deeply concerned about the shutdown in the economy caused by the mobilisation of most of the male population under the age of 50. Amit told me in 2002 about a crucial meeting he had with the US defence secretary, Robert McNamara. "I said… 'I'm going to recommend a war'. "McNamara asked only two questions. 'How long?' I said it would take a week. 'How many casualties?' I said less than the war of independence, which was 6,000. McNamara said 'I read you loud and clear'." The Americans had given a clear signal. They had been told that Israel would be going to war and had made no attempt to stop it happening. Amit travelled back to Israel with the Washington ambassador, Abe Harman, on an aircraft full of gas masks. They arrived in Tel Aviv on the evening of Saturday 3 June. A car took them straight to Eshkol's apartment, where he was waiting with his key ministers. Amit wanted an immediate war. Harman wanted to wait another week or so. Dayan disagreed: "If we wait for seven to nine days, there will be thousands dead. It's not logical to wait. Let's strike first and then look after the political side." Everyone who was there had no doubt that the decision had been taken. Israel was going to war. The cabinet ratified it the next morning. In Egypt, Nasser predicted Israel would attack on 4 or 5 June. He based his observation on the progress of an Iraqi armoured division, which was heading towards the Jordan Valley and Israel. He knew Israel would not tolerate such a change in the balance of forces. Surprise attack By 07:40 on 5 June, Ezer Weizman could hardly stand the suspense in the Air Force command centre in the ministry of defence in Tel Aviv. The Israeli war plan depended on a surprise attack, called Operation Focus, which would destroy the Arab air forces on the ground, starting with Egypt. They had trained for it for years and the first wave of attacks was about to go in.  
  
This video can not be played To play this video you need to enable JavaScript in your browser.  
  
Media caption, Six Day War: What happened - in 60 seconds Unlike the Egyptians and the other Arab armies, the Israelis had done their homework. They had flown hundreds of reconnaissance missions over the years to build up an accurate picture of every airbase in Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Pilots had a target book, giving the details of their layouts, call signs and defences. From radio intercepts they even built up voice-recognition files of the main Arab commanders. It was a huge success. Field Marshal Amer and the Egyptian top brass were meeting at Bir Tamada, an airbase in Sinai. They were just starting the meeting when the first Israeli jets started their bomb runs. One of the generals was so surprised by the attack that the first thing that flashed through his mind was a coup or some other kind of Egyptian betrayal. Amer's plane was able to take off but at one point had nowhere to land as every Egyptian airbase was under attack. In Tel Aviv, Ezer Weizman was ecstatic. The attacks were going better than expected. They had achieved complete surprise over the enemy. He phoned his wife: "We've won the war," he shouted. Later in the day Israel destroyed most of the Jordanian and Syrian air forces. Israel controlled the skies, and after that it was matter of finishing the job.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Egypt's air force was decimated by Israel's pre-emptive strike Israel warned King Hussein not to enter the war. But his mind was already made up, and he had put Jordan's efficient army under the command of a less than capable Egyptian general. Just before midday fighting started in Jerusalem. The Jordanians opened fire. King Hussein ignored Israeli signals that Jordan would be spared if it stayed out of the war. After the Samua raid in 1966 he didn't believe Israeli assurances; and he was convinced that if he reneged on the military alliance he had entered with Egypt he would lose his throne. Further south, Israeli ground forces had pushed into the Sinai desert, and were moving forward rapidly in three broad thrusts. The Egyptians fought bravely from fixed positions but unlike the Israelis had not been trained to improvise, or to be flexible or speedy. In the army headquarters in Cairo the commanders were increasingly gripped by panic. General Salahdeen Hadidi slumped in his chair, convinced that the war was at least half lost. It was worse than that for Egypt. But outside on the streets the people were celebrating. Crowds poured into the city by evening on buses provided by the ruling party. Voice of the Arabs was their trusted source of news and truth, and it was pushing out fantasy. By 20:17 it was reporting that 86 Israeli aircraft had been destroyed and that Egyptian tanks had broken into Israel. At the headquarters of the Sinai front, General Mohamed Abdel Ghani Gamasy listened "with growing horror" to what he knew was a pack of nonsense. Years later I asked Ahmed Said why he had told outright lies on air. In his crumbling, once-grand apartment overlooking the Nile, he defended himself.  
  
Image source, Empics  
  
Image caption, 5 June: Egyptian warplanes destroyed on the tarmac "You're asking people to fight, not dance… we believed the broadcasts were our most powerful weapon… many of our listeners were illiterate, so radio was the most important way to reach them." Back in 1967, as real news of the defeats came through, Nasser and Amer had retreated to their villas. Anwar Sadat, who later as president made a historic peace deal with Israel and was assassinated by his own guards as a result, went for a long walk through the streets of Cairo. "Dazed and broken-hearted" he watched Nasser loyalists marching up and down the main avenue leading to the pyramids, chanting and dancing to fake reports of an imaginary victory. A new landscape In the five days that followed Israel routed the armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria. It captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai desert from Egypt; the Golan Heights from Syria; and the West Bank and East Jerusalem, from Jordan. For the first time in almost two millennia the Jewish holy places in Jerusalem were under the control of Jews. More Palestinians were expelled, fled or were killed, though not on the scale of 1948.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, 7 June: Israeli soldiers approach the Dome of the Rock in East Jerusalem Nasser resigned, but changed his mind after millions went out into the streets to mourn and protest. He stayed in the job until his death in 1970. Field Marshal Amir died in mysterious circumstances. His family was convinced he was poisoned. King Hussein of Jordan lost East Jerusalem but kept his throne. He continued his secret dialogue with Israel and made peace in 1994. In Syria, the air force commander who had been in the ruling junta seized sole power in 1970. His name was Hafez al-Assad. His son, Bashar, succeeded him as president on his death in 2000.  
  
In Israel, Prime Minister Eshkol died of a heart attack in 1969. His widow, Miriam, believed that he had never recovered from being forced out of the ministry of defence on the eve of war. Eshkol's successor, Golda Meir, was warned in 1973 that Egypt and Syria were preparing a surprise attack. But the Israelis were still suffering from hubris after the crushing defeat they had inflicted in 1967. In the war that followed Israel was saved by a massive airlift of supplies from the United States. Egypt believed it had redeemed its national honour, and its president, Anwar Sadat, followed through with his historic overture for peace. After 1967 the Americans looked at Israel with new eyes. It fell in love with the young sabras who had beaten three Arab armies.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, The 1967 war changed many people's perception of Israel and its armed forces Like most Westerners in 1967, President Johnson's envoy Harry McPherson was deeply impressed. "Israel at war destroys the prototype of the pale, scrawny Jew; the soldiers I saw were tough, muscular and sunburned. There is also an extraordinary combination of discipline and democracy among officers and enlisted men; the latter rarely salute and frequently argue, but there is no doubt about who will prevail." Israel and the Palestinians felt the biggest consequences of the 1967 war. Israel began an occupation of the Palestinian territories that continues half a century later. It annexed East Jerusalem and the Golan Heights, in moves not recognised internationally. A 25-year-old Israeli soldier back from the war told his comrades: "We've lost something terribly precious. We've lost our little country."  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Israeli occupation replaced Jordanian occupation in the West Bank All the issues that are now depressingly familiar to anyone who follows the news - violence, occupation, settlements, the future of Jerusalem - took their current form as a result of the war. The shape of the occupation emerged very quickly. Predictions of the dangers that lay ahead were ignored. Just after the war ended, David Ben Gurion, Israel's first prime minister, warned against the seductive charms of victory. In a speech at Beit Berl, the think tank of the Israeli Left, he said that staying in the territories would distort the Jewish state and might even destroy it. Israel must keep Jerusalem, but everything else must go back to the Arabs, with or without a peace deal. Abba Eban, the foreign minister, saw maps that showed Israel stretching from the Golan to Suez and along the entire length of the River Jordan not as a "guarantee of peace but an invitation to early war".  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Israeli tanks in action on the Golan Heights But the mood in Israel blew away any suggestion of caution as decisively as the Israeli army had dealt with the Arabs. In just under a week of war the Israeli public went from despair to the joy of deliverance. Religious Jews believed that the victory was a miracle that had been given to them by God. Secular Israelis felt the electricity of the moment. Hanan Porat, a paratrooper who went on to become a leader of the settlement movement, never forgot the sight of his secular comrades weeping at the Western Wall, a remnant from the time of the second Jewish Temple, in East Jerusalem, a few minutes after they captured it. "I had a sense that here in Jerusalem the inner truth of the Jewish nation was revealed. It was a miracle because the truth of the Bible was combined with the truth of life. An electric current ran right through the people of Israel."  
  
Image source, AFP  
  
Image caption, Israeli paratroopers at the newly captured Western Wall - the image became iconic for Jews around the world The teaching of Rabbi Zvi Yehuda Kook inspired many of the settlers, including Porat. A leader of religious Zionism, Kook taught that the Israeli armed forces had done God's work. "The IDF [Israel Defense Forces] is total sanctity. It represents the rule of the people of the Lord over His land." It followed that land gifted to the Jewish people by a miracle from God could not be given up. The difficulty they faced was that Palestinians believed it was their land, and their duty to protect the holy places they venerated.  
  
President Johnson's Middle East adviser Bob Anderson warned a month after the war that Jerusalem had a special significance for Arabs. "The Old City of Jerusalem is capable of stirring mobs in the streets to the point where the fate of our most moderate friends in the Middle East will be in jeopardy and the basis laid for a later holy war." Some Israelis thought they might be able to trade some of the captured territory for peace, though not East Jerusalem which was enlarged with the addition of a band of territory from the West Bank and then annexed. At a summit in Khartoum at the end of August, Arab states were in no mood to go cap in the hand to the country that had humiliated them, again. Arab leaders said there would be no negotiations, no recognition and no peace with Israel. Paradoxically, defeat in 1967 helped kick start the Palestinian national movement. Before then the Palestine Liberation Organisation had been a puppet of Nasser, a way of containing the Palestinians rather than helping their fight for independence. After 1967 Yasser Arafat and his Fatah faction took matters into their own hands. After several dozen Fatah hit and run raids in only three months in 1968, the Israelis mounted a reprisal raid on the group's headquarters in Karameh refugee camp in Jordan.  
  
Image source, Getty Images  
  
Image caption, Members of Fatah on parade in the Jordanian capital, Amman, in August 1970 They ran into unexpected opposition from Palestinian guerrillas and Jordanian artillery. The Israelis destroyed Karameh in the end, but only after hours of street fighting that cost them at least 30 dead. Over 100 Fatah fighters were killed, and were celebrated as national heroes. Arafat became chairman of the moribund PLO, and an international figure, the symbol of national liberation for Palestinians, the world's worst terrorist for Israelis.  
  
What happened after the war  
  
Yitzhak Rabin served two terms as Israeli prime minister, firstly in the mid-1970s, and later between 1992-1995; in his second term of office he negotiated and signed historic Oslo peace accords with the Palestinians, for which he shared a Nobel Peace prize; he was assassinated by an ultra-nationalist Israeli Jew in Tel Aviv in 1995  
  
King Hussein of Jordan ordered the expulsion of PLO forces from Jordan in 1970 and rejected calls by Egypt and Syria to join their war against Israel in 1973. After years of secret talks, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. Hussein died in 1999  
  
Hafez al-Assad took power in a 1970 coup and was elected Syrian president in a referendum a year later; he ruled the country until he died in 2000. Relations with Israel remained hostile - there was an unsuccessful attempt to take back the Golan Heights in the 1973 Middle East war, and Assad continued to refuse any peace deal which did not include the return of Syrian territory  
  
Gamal Abdel Nasser died of a heart attack in 1970; his successor, Anwar Sadat, eventually sought peace with Israel, signing an historic treaty in 1979; he was assassinated by an Egyptian officer in 1981.  
  
Lasting legacy The 1967 war made Israel into an occupier, which is why more than anything else it matters. The experience has been a disaster for Israelis and Palestinians. Israel built settlements for Jews, in defiance of international law that says occupiers cannot settle their people on the land they capture. Israel, though, sees it differently. Abba Eban predicted that Palestinians would not lose their "taste for flags, honour, pride and independence." Military occupation is by definition oppressive. The occupation has created a culture of violence that cheapens life and brutalises the people who impose and enforce the occupation and those who fight it.  
  
Image source, AFP  
  
Image caption, The ramifications of the war are still felt, 50 years on Peace negotiations started in the early 1990s to try to unwind the consequences of the 1967 war. Yitzhak Rabin, by then prime minister, shook hands with his old enemy Yasser Arafat under the gaze of a beaming President Clinton on the lawn of the White House in 1993. The peace process was flawed from the start for both sides. But it was all they had. Extreme Israeli right-wingers took it seriously; they believed it threatened their dream of controlling all the land that God had given to the Jewish people. A Jewish extremist assassinated Rabin in Tel Aviv in 1995. His killer was so pleased that he had killed a man he saw as a traitor and a threat to Jews that during his first interrogation he picked up a cup to toast his success. Rabin was the necessary man for Israelis; they trusted him with their security. That was why he was killed. The peace process might have failed with Rabin. But without the man who had prepared and led the army to victory in 1967, and with Palestinian violence against Israelis rising in the unstable years after the assassination, peace did not have a chance. Fifty years on from 1967, President Trump - like many new American presidents - is hoping to help Israelis and Palestinians make peace. If his dreams become substantive talks, they will have to be about the future of the land that was captured in six days of war. It was an extraordinary human drama, which swept up a generation of Israelis and Arabs whose children and grandchildren still cannot live peacefully in the world the war created. The Holy Land, with Jerusalem at its heart, is a place where the great tectonic plates of religion, culture and nationalism come together. The fault lines that run between them are never quiet and always dangerous. Ignoring the legacy of 1967 is not an option.  
  
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