

# Arabs and Israelis Not Ready for War

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London Observer

## News Analysis

LONDON, May 19—If war breaks out on Israel's borders with her Arab neighbors it will be by accident rather than design. No one wants it and no one—in spite of the saber-rattling on both sides—is prepared for it.

Cairo, Tel Aviv, Damascus, Beirut, Amman are, for practical purposes, "open cities," extremely vulnerable to air attack. Civil defense in Arab cities, at least, is rudimentary if not nonexistent. No attempt has been made to alert the populations to the possibility of an all-out clash — because none is really expected.

The mobilization of five Arab armies, the massing of troops, the threatening speeches exchanged by Arab and Israeli leaders — all these bear the familiar imprint of propaganda exercises rather than deliberate steps to war.

### Logjam Remains

Indeed, nothing has happened in the past month to lead one to suppose that the 19-year-old logjam in Arab-Israeli relations is about to be disturbed. It remains frozen solid, not only by mutual fear and hostility but also by the exercise of con-

siderable caution and restraint—on both sides.

The view that the crisis is largely psychological applies equally to the most spectacular recent development: Egypt's call for the withdrawal of UNEF, the small United Nations peace-keeping force which patrols the Egyptian side of the border

with Israel. The truth is that had Egypt and Israel wanted, at any time in the past decade, to come to grips, UNEF could not have stopped them.

Peace was ensured by a healthy appraisal by both Egypt and Israel of the other's strength, by an existing balance of power, by Egypt's deliberate attempts to avoid provocation.

### Restraining Influence

Indeed, in Arab councils over the past decade, Egypt's President Nasser has been a restraining influence. He has argued repeatedly that the Arabs were not ready to take on Israel and that, if they were rash enough to try, they would face an immediate great power intervention.

What broad factors lie, then, at the root of the present flare-up? The first is that Syria is today governed by a small group of sincere and devoted, but not particularly wise or able, men. Belonging to an extremist wing of the Baath Party, they began rebelling against Nasser's caution over a year ago.

In a conscious bid for Arab revolutionary leadership, they launched a new Palestine policy, totally at odds with the defensive tactics Egypt advocated. Palestine, they declared, could only be liberated from the Jews by a popular liberation war on the Algerian model.

### Tension Rose

In speech after violent speech, Syria's leaders—

from President Attasi downward offered open encouragement to Palestinian commandos operating against Israel. The result was a sharp increase in tension and Israeli reprisals.

In the last week or two, the Syrian government came to believe that Israel was planning yet another strike. There were indications from Israel of a major reprisal if the commando and terrorist attacks from Syria continued.

Egypt was asked to make a clear and unmistakable gesture of support. Hence the massing of troops and Nasser's request to U Thant to withdraw UNEF from the Gaza border.

In spite of the international attention it commands, the Arab-Israeli dispute is today a sideshow compared to the infinitely more active and virulent warfare which Egypt and Saudi Arabia are waging against each other, not only in Yemen and South Arabia but in a thousand forms of propaganda, subversion and intimidation. It is a life and death struggle, with no holds barred. At stake is not only the survival of the rival regimes but the whole future orientation of the area. This contest overshadows every other issue.

If Nasser asks for UNEF's withdrawal it is not because he wants to fight Israel but because, needled by Saudi and Jordanian taunts that he has been hiding behind the U.N. force, he wants to reassert his prestige as Arab champion at a critical moment in the inter-Arab struggle.