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The Six-Day War (Arab-Israeli War)



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Introduction

It is June 6th, 1967, yesterday armed conflict broke out between Israel and its neighbouring countries. At this very moment, Israeli forces are on the offensive on the Sinai Peninsula and are close to capturing Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Tensions had been present in the region for decades but the situation escalated only yesterday. This conflict has the possibility of causing the death of tens-of-thousands if not more. With no evidence proving which side is the aggressor the Security Council now stands for a difficult task to solve the issue at hand. In this research report a detailed summary of the events leading up to this conflict and of the historical background attached to the tensions inside the region can be found.

Definition of Key Terms

Peninsula

A peninsula is a land area almost completely surrounded by water, which is only connected to the mainland by a small connecting piece of land. Examples are Crimea, the Korean Peninsula and the Iberian Peninsula.

League of Nations Mandate

According to the Encyclopaedia Britannica a League of Nations Mandate is an authorization granted by the League of Nations to a member nation to govern a former German or Turkish colony. The aim for the mandate holders (in our case the UK and France) was to prepare the mandate area for independence.

The United Nations Security Council

The United Nations Security Council commonly referred to as the Security Council or UNSC, serves as the most important organ of the United Nations. Consisting of 5 permanent members with veto rights and 10 rotating members, it is primarily tasked with maintaining international peace and security. It can establish international sanctions and peacekeeping organisations, as well as authorising military action.

Zionism

According to the Jewish Virtual Library Zionism means “the national movement for the return of the Jewish people to their homeland and the resumption of Jewish sovereignty in the Land of Israel. Leo Pinsker and Theodor Herzl are widely regarded as pioneers in the Zionist movement.

General Overview

The Birth of the State of Israel

The First World War meant a true turning point in the history of the Middle-East. After the First World War, western powers took control over the Middle-East, created new states and with the Balfour declaration of 1917 what was then the Palestinian Mandate became the so-called national home for the Jewish people. With that declaration, the British government showed its sympathy for the Zionist movement and allowed for Jewish migration to the area of the Palestinian Mandate. In a draft treaty on this mandate the Brits expressed that it was not the intention to give the mandate an exclusively Jewish character, neither did it speculate about an independent Jewish state in future, nor did it speak of the possibility of Palestinian independence.

The Palestinian mandate existed out of the former Ottoman province of Palestine, which unsurprisingly was the home of the Palestinian people. Palestine was poor and faced problems such as an underdeveloped education system. The British gambled on good cooperation between the Jewish immigrants and the native Palestinians, but were proven wrong. For the Palestinians, the Jewish people felt like foreigners trying to colonise their native home. This was stimulated by the creation of what can be described as a state within a state (the creation of a Jewish trade union (Histadrut), a Jewish pseudo-government (Jewish Agency) and a Jewish defence force (Haganah). The Palestinian could do little about it, due to their technological, organisational and financial disadvantages. After Adolf Hitler

rose to power in Germany and the terror which followed Jewish migration to the Palestinian dramatically increased, with the all-time high being 60000 in the year 1935 (the start of the Nuremberg Laws). In three years' time, the Jewish population doubled with the influx of a total 170000 Jewish refugees. In the year 1936 anti-Jewish demonstrations led to a civil war, which lasted almost three years and caused the death of 70000. During this time, the British were still responsible for the mandate and had to find a way to ease the tensions. In 1939, they introduced the White Paper, decreeing reduced Jewish immigration and limited possibilities for Jews to acquire land. Leading to furious responses from the Zionistic movement.

When the Second World War broke out Zionistic militias, such as the Haganah, chose to support the allied forces, with David Ben-Gurion saying: We will fight with Great-Britain as if there were no White Paper, and against the White Paper as if there was no war. A new separate Jewish brigade was formed which fought the axis in both Northern Africa and later in Italy as well. Not all of the Jewish population supported these events, this resulted small extremist Jewish militias, such as the Irgun and the Stern group, committing terror attacks on both Arabic and British institutions. In the eyes of these extreme Zionist groups Hitler and Churchill were two sides of the same coin. In 1945 the gates of Hitler's concentration camps opened to the world. With dismay, the world learned about the horrors of the Holocaust, the genocide that plagued the European Jews. The worst fears were surpassed by the bitter reality. Nearly six million Jews had been killed. The world hadn't succeeded in preventing the genocide. During the Nuremberg trials, the most horrific details came to light. The need for a Jewish state seemed more necessary than ever before, not least because of Western politicians plagued with feelings of guilt about their own passivity or naivety during the war. Jews that had managed to survive (about one million were left alive in the whole of Europe), who had lost family and friends, mostly wanted just one thing, namely to find refuge in a Jewish homeland. Meanwhile Great-Britain had put a full stop to Jewish migration to Palestine, in accordance with the White Paper. The Zionistic movement therefore turned against the British having the mandate over Palestine.

The British were barely able to maintain order in Palestine. They executed mass-arrests amongst Zionists. While extremists Zionists were committing terror attacks and acts of sabotage. Vessels that can hardly be described as seaworthy were stuffed with Jewish refugees and tried to drop their human load on the shores of Palestine. One ship appropriately named the Exodus 47 was entered by the British and its passengers were forced to return to Germany. This was propaganda for the Jewish case. The British

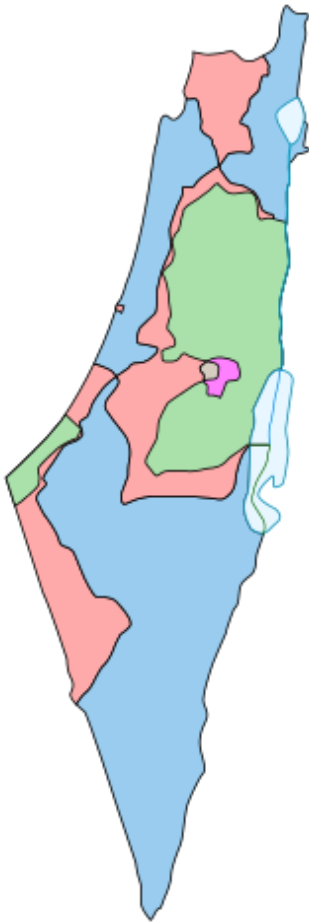


government eventually gave up and announced in September 1947 that it would hand the mandate over to the United Nations by 15 May 1948. Inevitably this caused the Palestinian conflict to escalate even further, but this time the British didn't even try to intervene. On November 29, 1947, the UN General Assembly voted to divide Palestine into an Arabic state populated by Palestinians and a Jewish state, which would cover more than half of the mandate, while only a third of the population consisted out of Jews. The Zionists accepted the compromise but the Palestinians were vehemently opposed. Again, major hostilities broke out, resulting in cruel reprisal actions. Multiple events such as the capture of Haifa and Jaffa made Palestinians flee in panic; they however were still convinced of an eventual Arab victory. On the 14th of May 1948, one day before the British would hand over the Palestinian mandate; David Ben-Gurion proclaimed the state of Israel in the area that the UN had allocated to the Jews.

Israeli-Arab relations

Meanwhile other former provinces of the Ottoman Empire had gone through a similar occupation by western forces. After the First World War Transjordan, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria had all become mandates of either the UK or France, as agreed upon under the secret Sykes-Picot Agreement and finalised in the Treaty of San Remo (1920). Egypt on the other hand had been under British control since 1882. Arabs saw these occupations as a humiliation and as will be explained further on in the research report didn't in the slightest agree with the borders drawn by the Western powers. They in fact consider the year 1920 as "Am al-nakbah" translated as the disaster year. In the other mandate countries as well as Egypt nationalism quickly gained traction and uprisings against their oppressors got even more common. Egypt and Iraq got their independence in 1922 and 1932 respectively, with the other countries Transjordan, Syria and Lebanon following suit in the years 1945 and 1946. In 1945 these countries among others had founded the Arabian League. The proclamation of Israeli independence was a call to arms for them. Armed forces from Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, Transjordan and Iraq, together with the Arab Liberation Army, attacked Israel in order to help the Arabian Palestinians, who after did not have armed forces, on the contrary to the Zionists. This war is commonly referred to as the Israeli war of independence. The attack however was poorly prepared. Arabian troops, only 21500 men, were insufficiently trained and had low morale. The 35000 Israeli Haganah fighters on the other hand were rather highly motivated for they were defending their newly gained homeland. The war lasted for the full year of 1948. An armistice was agreed upon in the early months of 1949; Israel managed to conquer land in this war and under its new borders (which covered





almost 80% of the territory of the former mandate of Palestine) it was admitted to the UN. The rest of the mandate territory came under control of Egypt (the Gaza strip) and Transjordan (West Bank). The leftmost map shows the mandate that was originally allocated to the state of Israel. Added to that is the part in red which the Israeli gained after the War of Independence. In green are the Gaza strip (left) and the West Bank (right).

It can be argued that the Israeli state was found by people who had to go through great despair, but that its founding was cause for despair as well. The war had brought about a flow of tens of thousands of Palestinian refugees, fleeing from approximately 400 different towns. Approximately 160000 Palestinians remained to live within the borders of Israel. Most refugees ended up in refugee camps in the Gaza strip and the West Bank, returning wasn't an option because the Israeli government plainly refused to let them back in. The refugees were dependent on the UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency). With no other place to go these refugee camps quickly grew into semi-permanent settlements. In time, these camps became breeding grounds for frustration and radicalisation. Arabian leaders pointed to the suffering of thousands of Palestinians to show the inhumanity of Israel. From this point on the year 1948 was also considered an "Am al-nakbah" in the collective memory of the Arabs. Not a single Arabian country recognised the Israeli state, nor were they willing to agree to a more permanent peace treaty. The base of a new conflict was now prominently present.

The birth of Israel served as encouragement for new Jewish migrants and therefore according to data from the virtual Jewish Library in a period of just three years (1948-1951) the Israeli population doubled from roughly 650000 to just over 1.3 million. One in two inhabitants was a so-called displaced person (people who had survived concentration camps and their relatives, many of whom were traumatised). The waves of immigrants that followed mainly consisted of Jews living in other parts of the Arab world, who had long been living as minorities amongst Muslims. Just from Morocco alone 230000 Jews sought refuge in Israel. Another 130000 came from Iraq. These "Eastern" Jews are referred to by the term "Sephardim". In general Sephardim are relatively more in favour of a strong foreign policy

when it comes to Arabian neighbour countries than “Western” Jews also known as “Ashkenazim”. What this divide however did not include was the need most inhabitants felt for their nation to be heavily armed. While the young state of Israel was consolidating, there was a sense of defeat in the Arab world. They felt humiliated and fervent nationalists called vengeance on Israel, a “Zionistic entity” they did not wish to tolerate. The only Arabian leader who seemed to have profited from the war was king Abdullah of Jordan (Transjordan had changed its name into Jordan). He had gained control over the West Bank region and managed to annex the territory. He however was killed in 1951 and replaced by his grandson Hussein, who remains King of Jordan to this day. Another king was replaced in Egypt, but not in similar fashion. King Farouk was toppled and his country became a republic, led by the young colonel Gamal Abdel Nasser.

Nasser promised to take revenge on Israel and to liberate his country from the last remaining foreigners. This is particularly relevant because the British were still in control over the Suez Canal, depriving Egypt from what could possibly be its most lucrative source of income. Therefore, Nasser announced in July 1957 that he would nationalise the Suez Canal. The canal was the number one symbol of western domination and Nasser thought that domination was long overdue and needed to be dealt with. Egyptian masses were cheering. But London was furious. The British prestige was hurt and prime-minister Anthony Eden conveniently compared Nasser’s politics with Hitler. Together with the French and the Israeli the British drew up a plan to attack Egypt. On the 29th of October 1956, the plan went into action, this is the start of the escalation of the Suez Crisis. Despite Israeli advances on the Sinai Peninsula, the operation was doomed. The whole world had been watching and was appalled by this neo-imperialistic action. Especially America was not happy with its NATO allies of France and the UK. After a week of fighting the UN accomplished a peace treaty which forced the UK, France and Israel to leave Egypt and later that year the UN placed peacekeepers along the Israeli-Egyptian border. Nasser became the hero of the Arabian peoples and his dream of Arabian unity seemed ever more reasonable. A year later this resulted into the merger of Syria and Egypt into the United Arab Republic (UAR). In the beginning Syrians were delighted but they later grew resistant when hundreds of Egyptian officials telling them how to run their country. In 1961 Syria left the UAR. Nasser’s ideology of Arabic Socialism however remained popular and in both Syria and Iraq “Baath” parties rose to power. Baath can be translated to resurrection. Both nations were bitterly divided and if one can learn anything from history then it is the principle of nothing being able of uniting a people better than a common enemy. This enemy was Israel.



Current situation

Tensions between Israel and its neighbouring Arab countries really gained traction in these years. In Israel, Palestinians were attacking civilians on many different occasions and Israeli responded to that with rebuttal actions as well as further with arming their nation. In 1964 the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) is formed. The Arab League believed there was a need for an organisation that spoke up for the Palestinian people, which was why the PLO came to be. The organisations aim, according to their founding principles, was to ensure the liberation of the Palestinian people through armed struggle. Many nations consider the PLO to be a terrorist organisation. In the early months of this year the conflict has reached its highest point when it comes to tension. The number of border incidents dramatically increased and Jewish settlements in Galilee have been targeted from what is speculated to be coming from the Syrian Golan Heights. Israeli fears of a united Arabian Federation with a strong army have reached all-time high. Official Arabian press organs in Egypt, Syria and Iraq have been branding Israel as an outpost of western imperialism and have been using the popular phrase of "driving them (the Israeli) into sea"¹. They feared the Israeli wanted to enlarge their territory. Due to this Egypt has been amassing its army near the border on the Sinai Peninsula, while asking the UN to remove the peacekeepers from the border with Israel, which the UN did. At the same time Jordan, Egypt and Iraq agreed upon a defensive pact. Yesterday (June the 5th 1967) fighting broke out between Israel and all of its neighbouring countries. It is very much unclear which party started the armed combat. At this very moment, Israeli troops are near to capturing Bethlehem and the old city of Jerusalem. And they have also managed to advance far into the Sinai Peninsula. It is up to the United Nations to now find a solution and look for a way to solve this conflict.

Major Parties Involved

Israel

Israel is one of the parties most prominently present in the conflict. As previously elaborated upon, Israel is a heavily armed nation which is completely surrounded by nations with whom it maintains no diplomatic relations at all. The country is under an ever so present

¹ "Did Arab States Really Promise to Push Jews Into the Sea? Yes!" *Theallgemeiner.com*. N.p., 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 11 June 2017

threat by its many enemies and currently is at war with its neighbours. Israel would most likely want to ensure permanent safety for its inhabitants.

United States of America

The USA is on very friendly terms with the state of Israel. Although it intervened on the side of Egypt during the Suez Crisis the USA and Israel don't seem to hold a grudge against each other. Moreover, just like the UK the USA exports weapons to Israel enabling them to be heavily armed with state of the art weaponry. The USA will try to ensure the continuing existence of Israel and is wary of possible escalation into a bigger worldwide conflict. US President Lyndon B Johnson illustrated this by saying: "Israel will not be on its own unless it chooses to."

Soviet Union

The Soviet Union maintains strong and relatively stable relations with opposite side of the conflict. Egypt, Jordan and Syria are close allies and the Soviet Union provides them with military equipment. The Soviet Union is also worried about the possibility of Israel possessing nuclear arms. Like the USA, the Soviets are also concerned about the possible escalation of the conflict and would therefore try to find a solution to contain the conflict.

Arab Defense Pact

Egypt, Jordan and Syria are the Arabian countries that seem to be most prominently involved in the conflict with Israel. Egypt and Jordan are currently losing ground and Syria fears the Golan Heights might be under threat as well. Despite the current situation they remain confident the Israeli can be defeated. What they want to see, first and foremost, is the end of the state of Israel and secondly the creation of a Palestinian state.

Timeline of Key Events

Date	Description of Event
6 June 1967	Israeli armed forces are close to capturing Bethlehem and the old city of Jerusalem
5 June 1967	Armed combat breaks out between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states
28 May 1964	Founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation



2 November 1917	Balfour declaration
26 April 1920	San Remo Conference
23 May 1939	Publishing of the White Paper
29 November 1947	UN proposes partition plan for the Mandate of Palestine
1947-1948	Civil War in the Mandate of Palestine
14 May 1948	Israeli Declaration of Independence
15 May 1948	Start of the Israeli War of Independence
10 March 1949	End of the Israeli War of Independence
26 July 1956	Nasser announces the nationalisation of the Suez Canal
29 October 1956	Start Suez Crisis
22 February 1958	Egypt and Syria unite to form the UAR
28 September 1961	Syria leaves the United Arab Republic (UAR)
28 May 1964	Founding of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation
5 June 1967	Armed combat breaks out between Israel and its neighbouring Arab states
6 June 1967	Israeli armed forces are close to capturing Bethlehem and the old city of Jerusalem

Relevant UN Treaties

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 181

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 660

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 997

United Nations Security Council Resolution 89

Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue

Since the conflict erupted so recently no international action has yet been taken at this point of time. There have however been attempts to solve the core of the issue. The most notable of these is of course the proposed Partition Plan of the Mandate of Palestine, by the UN in November 1947. The plan consisted out of UN General Assembly resolution



181, in which the UN proposed to divide the Mandate into two, one part to be controlled by the Palestinians and one part by the Zionists. This plan was well received by the Jewish population, but not by the Palestinians. They did not agree to the plan and therefore it failed. What was also tried was the instalment of UN peacekeepers on the Egyptian-Israeli border. Just weeks ago, upon request of Nasser they withdrew and their demilitarised zone disappeared. This can therefore also be considered as a failure.

Possible Solutions

There are multiple steps towards solving the crisis that should be considered, ranging from ceasefires to arms embargos. What first needs to be considered is what would be the best way of put an immediate halt to the conflict. This could be done by implementing embargoes or sanctioning countries involved. Ceasefires are also very much worth considering.

Afterwards the UNSC could start working on the much-needed peace-making process. This may prove very difficult as both sides of the conflict are not particularly willing to compromise. Defining the borders of the state of Israel and ensuring the sovereign integrity of a possible Palestinian state are vital in this process. Peacekeeping forces can also play a part in creating long-lasting peace, but as mentioned in the Previous Attempts to Resolve the Issue-section this is not has proven to be not a fully reliable measure.

Next to this the UNSC can look at the issues that are at the core of this conflict. Is there a place for Jews in the Middle-East? And how can Arab/Palestinian rights be ensured inside Israel? The issue at hand is a very delicate one and therefore delegates must bear in mind that since they are part of the Historical Security Council, there is a need for innovative solution so as to avoid provoking veto power responses from P5 nations.

Appendices

Appendix A

Der Judenstaat, Versuch einer modernen Lösung der Judenfrage, by Thomas Herzl



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⁵ "Did Arab States Really Promise to Push Jews Into the Sea? Yes!" *Theallgemeiner.com*. N.p., 20 Feb. 2014. Web. 11 June 2017

