

# National Security Strategy: The Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1916-1978

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**Overview.** We look at the history preceding the establishment of Israel, and then trace the events of the first phase of the Arab-Israeli conflict: the time when Arab states were united in their desire to destroy the new state by the force of arms. We examine regional politics, imperial interests, super-power rivalries, and the continuing territorial disputes.

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This is a very contentious issue, and one is well-advised to take any opinion rendered on it with a huge grain of salt. The analyst's predisposition toward the Arabs (Palestinians) or the Israeli (Jews) invariably tilts the conclusions with a selective reading of the evidence. One should always be aware of the background and political orientation of the analysts.

## 1 The Setting

Following World War I, the Ottoman Empire's holdings in the Middle East passed on to the victorious Britain and France, which divided it in spheres of influence (Sykes-Picot Agreement, April 1916). Britain got the lion's share of the territories (France got Syria and Lebanon), and proceeded to rule them like an imperial power. Britain disposed of land, established borders, and installed rulers without any regard for the ethnic or religious composition of the inhabitants. As a result, the order it imposed lacked any legitimacy and was bound to be challenged.

During the war itself, the British made various promises to various groups. Most famously, the government committed to the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine (Balfour Declaration, November 1917) but it also promised Hussein (Sharif of Mecca) to support Arab independence if he rebelled against the Turks. In other words, in the frantic search for help during the war, Britain made incompatible promises to both Jews and Arabs, while secretly dividing the land between itself and France. The results were, perhaps predictably, chaotic.

Britain initially encouraged emigration of European Jews to Palestine, the influx soon caused the Arabs to suspect yet another attempt at colonial rule (incorrectly) and an attempt to grab land from them to establish a Jewish state (correctly). Violence increased and a series of Arab revolts followed, most of them involving serious atrocities. The problem was that the Jews had always been a minority in Palestine despite their ancient ties to the region. Despite lofty statements to the contrary, nobody really believed that Jews and Arabs could live in peace in a single state. Partitioning Palestine was the only way to guarantee that the Jewish minority would not continue to be relegated to second-class status in the region (as it always had been).

Efforts to demonstrate that the Jews were a majority in Palestine are wrong-headed and misguided. They were always a minority (11% in 1922, 17% in 1931, and 33% in 1945) despite the massive immigration at the turn of the 20th century. On the other hand, there was no Arab state in the Palestine from which to take the lands. The British had created various entities to suit their imperial interests during the interwar period. But Palestine had been part of a *sanjak* in the Ottoman Empire, not an independent state. Furthermore, the British had already partitioned some of the lands creating the state of Transjordan (1923) from which Jews were expelled. Palestinian Arabs comprised two-thirds of its population although the king was a Hashemite and brother to the one the British installed on the Iraqi throne.

The series of attacks of Arabs on Jews finally forced the Jews to form the Haganah (Defense), the precursor of the Israel Defense Forces (the army). During the 1920s, Arabs attacks Jews all over the region, including the most famous massacre at Hebron in 1929 when they ethnically cleansed the city of Jews. In 1937, the British Peel Commission proposed a partition that would create a predominantly Jewish state on about 20% of the area of Palestine, with the remainder going to Transjordan. It was rejected by both sides, provoking an Arab revolt and an outbreak of terrorist campaigns on both sides, forcing the British to shelve the proposal the following year. Eventually, Haganah helped the British quell the uprising in 1939.

However, because of the violence and the desire to appease the Arabs who began growing steadily more important in imperial foreign policy, the British decided to renege on their promise to the Jews and began restricting immigration in the 1930s. This was exceptionally unfortunate because it coincided with the time when the Nazis in Germany began accelerating their persecution of the Jews that would soon spread to the rest of Europe and end in the Holocaust.

In the infamous MacDonald White Paper of 1939, the British abandoned the idea for a state with a Jewish majority, restricted Jewish immigration, and limited the amount of land that Jews could purchase in the region. Despite the protests, the paper remained policy until 1947, preventing an untold number of Jews from escaping the Holocaust. However, despite the policy, the Jews threw their lot with the Allies (after all, these were restricting immigration, not gassing them en masse).

The Arabs made a huge mistake and supported the Axis powers. The British-appointed Mufti of Jerusalem Haj Amin al-Husseini (supposed to be the speaker of the Arabs) incited the Palestinians to revolt against Britain, met with Hitler to urge a “final solution” for the Palestinian Jews, obtained Germany’s promise to destroy the Jewish National Home as soon as the Germans made it to the Middle East, and personally petitioned Hungary to send Jews for extermination to the death camps in Poland. The Mufti incited the Arabs into indiscriminate murder of Jews, shifting the conflict from one over possession of land to one over survival for the Jews.

Unfortunately for the Arabs, Germany lost the war. In the aftermath of this horrible conflict, the full extent of the German Holocaust finally dawned on the rest of the world. The 6 million Jews whom the Germans managed to exterminate cried out for expiation. Europe has always been a bastion of anti-Semitism throughout history. Periodic pogroms, expulsions, and violent persecution of Jews has been the norm from medieval until modern times. Nazism implemented the inevitable culmination of this deep-rooted hatred of Jews that had been steadily indoctrinated into the population.

The conclusion was simple: unless there was a state that could protect them, the Jews were perennially exposed to the depredations and whims of various rulers who were sometimes constrained but often were not by their fickle publics. Only a predominantly Jewish state that could protect its citizens with military

power could guarantee their safety. In some way, the Arabs would now have to pay for the sins of the Europeans. That they had supported the losing side in the war only made it easy for the victorious powers to force them to.

In the midst of escalating violence from both sides, including terrorism by Jewish paramilitary groups, the British decided to unload the problem on the United Nations. The 1947 U.N. partition of Palestine divided the land into a chunk where the predominantly Jewish state would come into being and another for an Arab state, with Jerusalem being placed under international regime. This was simultaneously a reward for the Jews for fighting against the Axis, a punishment for the Arabs for fighting against the Allies, and an appeasement of the collective conscience of the Europeans who had both allowed Germany to perpetrate its crimes against humanity and had failed (repeatedly) to save the Jews by offering them safe haven. Finally, it was an acknowledgment that the Jews and the Arabs could not live together in a dual state that would be dominated by the Arabs.

## **2 The War of Independence**

The Jews embraced the partition (U.N. Resolution 181) but the Arabs rejected it wholesale. Palestine had become a pan-Arab question that involved not only the Palestinian Arabs, but also Egyptians, Transjordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, and Iraqis. When the Jews proclaimed the creation of Israel on May 14, 1948, the Arab states attacked the new state from all sides.

Within a year, all Arab armies were defeated and Israel concluded separate cease-fire agreements with each of the Arab states. The war had quickly transformed into a land grab by everyone involved, all to the detriment of the Palestinians. Israel, as the victor, walked off with about 70% of Palestine under the mandate, increasing its land holdings by 50% over the U.N. partition. The new borders became known as the "Green Line." Israel had seized the opportunity to turn itself into a contiguous state with a Jewish majority. Egypt got the Gaza Strip, and Transjordan swallowed up the West Bank.

Although the Arabs rejected the partition plan, there were quite a few Jewish leaders, like Menachem Begin, who were interested in an Israel that would encompass Jerusalem and much of the Palestinian lands. Even Ben-Gurion seems to have regarded the partition as a temporary expedient before Israel could get strong enough to expand further. But even without such expansionists, Israel had fought for the right to own its lands and had paid with its own blood. The war had been costly to the Israelis: 6,373 casualties out of a population of about 650,000 (this is close to 1%, the equivalent loss for the United States in 2001, with population of about 285 million would be 2.85 million Americans). The Arabs lost about 4,000 men. The war left many scars on both sides because of wartime atrocities committed by Arabs and Jews.

The war created three problems that persist to this day. First, it denied the Palestinians a chance to form their own state. Of course, at the time they were

not really clamoring for a small state in Palestine but for a wholly Arab state, perhaps integrated with Syria. There is no doubt that had the Arabs won the war, Israel would have been wiped out, and its Jewish population extinguished. This was a war for survival and by winning it, Israel secured its right to exist in the time-honored fashion in which states have won their existence throughout history: by the sword.

Unfortunately, because of the inevitable Arab irredentism, the state that was created by the sword, would have to live by the sword. Despite the armistice, the Arabs claimed full belligerency status and reserved the right to renew hostilities at any given time. They did not recognize Israel's existence and closed the vital Straits of Tiran and the Suez Canal to Israeli shipping. Israel had hoped for peace and Ben-Gurion had stopped the IDF before it destroyed the Arab forces completely, but the hope evaporated quickly. Israel concluded that its only defense rested in maintaining a convincing deterrent posture: appear strong enough to deter the Arabs from attacking it.

Second, the war displaced an enormous number of civilians on both sides. About 700,000 Palestinians became refugees because they had to leave their homes that came under Israeli rule through a combination of forcible expulsion, fear of Israeli maltreatment, encouragement by Arab leaders, and promises that they would return to their lands as conquerors. At the same time about 600,000 Jews were forced out of Arab lands through a combination of the same factors that were displacing Palestinians. These fled to Israel which succeeded in absorbing them and integrating them.

Not so with the Palestinians, who were refused integration by the neighboring Arab states. Many were also denied return by Israel when its government concluded in June 1948 that the war would provide an opportunity to redress the demographic imbalance and stabilize the future state by ensuring its predominantly Jewish nature. These refugees have always been cynically used by their fellow Arabs for political ends: living in squalor, disenfranchised, and angry, they have always been a festering wound in the region and a ready tool for an aggression against Israel or an excuse for domestic incompetence.

It would take years before the Palestinians would begin the move toward their own independence and before such a move would be accepted by the warring sides. Caught between the hammer and the anvil, the Palestinians were betrayed by the Arab rulers who preferred to aggrandize their states with territories at their expense. As for the atrocities, although the ethics of the IDF gradually improved during the postwar years greatly diminishing the suffering of civilians caught in the cross-fire of subsequent wars, the Arab armies and later the Palestinian terrorists continued to explicitly target Israeli civilians.

Third, the defeat of the Arab armies was humiliating. Here was a new state with a fledgling army and without much international support (save arms shipped by the Czechs). And yet, the state mobilized and managed to defend itself producing what the Arabs called *al-nakba* (catastrophe). The illegitimate regimes of the failed Arab states were felled one by one in coups and assassinations. In

March 1949 in Syria (coup), then in July 1951 in Jordan (assassination), then in July 1952 in Egypt (coup), then in July 1958 in Iraq (revolution), then in 1958 in Lebanon (civil war), leaders were removed, stability vanished, and pan-Arabism spread, undermining the “order” set by the British mandate.

The Arabs never abandoned their express aim of Israel’s destruction. Claims to the contrary notwithstanding, both sides knew that the day or reckoning was coming. The region that had briefly emerged from colonial domination after World War 2, soon found itself in the thicket of superpower rivalry. America initially remained somewhat aloof except for its engagement in the 1947 Iranian crisis when it moved to deny the Soviets access to oil and to grab a large concession for itself to split with the British and the Dutch.

Very soon, however, America’s attitude to the Persian Gulf region would crystallize to what it has remained, with small variations, to this day. The basic goal of the strategy is to deny control of the region to one single power, especially one hostile to the West. This would include containment of the USSR, support for the regime in Saudi Arabia and Jordan, and shifting support between Iraq and Iran, as necessity required. As for Egypt, Syria, and Israel, American attitude would be primarily contingent on what the Soviets were doing.

While the USSR supported the creation of Israel and enabled the new state to survive its first war, the Americans limited themselves to recognition of the state. President Eisenhower, unlike Truman, was no great friend of Israel, which drew closer to Britain and France, whose interests in the region were becoming severely threatened by the Nasserite pan-Arabism. During the 1950s, America supported the Arabs and looked on Israel as a liability. However, in 1954 when the USSR switched its support from Israel to the Arabs figuring that this was the only way to gain a foothold in the region. In 1955 the Czechs shipped Soviet arms to Egypt and Nasser started to draw closer to the Russians. The Cold War soon spread to the Middle East.

Nasser appeared conciliatory to Israel but then demanded the entire Negev desert as the price for peace, which was unthinkable. The one issue with which all Arabs could readily identify was Israel’s continued existence that reminded them both of colonialism and of their own failed attempt to rid themselves of it. Nasser found it easy to mobilize public opinion against Israel and, by extension, against the status quo-oriented Arab governments that began viewing his growing popularity with increasing concern. While they all studiously paid lip service to the cause, many secretly worked to undermine Nasser’s preeminence. Egypt was far too large and important; it was the natural leader of the Arab world, and Nasser never concealed his ambition to create a pan-Arab state (with himself as its head).

### **3 The Suez War**

The 1950s were very tense: Palestinian guerilla attacks produced reprisals by the IDF that sometimes resulted in the deaths of innocent civilians. Israel tried to topple Nasser who responded by intensifying support for Palestinian raids

and seized an Israel ship trying to make it through the Suez Canal. Israel then initiated a raid into Gaza (2/28/55) in which over fifty Egyptian soldiers were killed. As Nasser gained influence and prestige, Israel's anxiety deepened: a charismatic leader could unite the Arab world and destroy Israel whose existence had become precarious when the Soviets threw their weight behind the Arabs and the Americans, friendly to many of the Arab regimes, remained non-committal. Without a great power behind it, Israel did not have much chance of standing up in an inevitable showdown.

Then Nasser appeared to blunder by taking a series of steps that put him on a collision course with the Americans, the British, and the French. Cozying up to the Soviets irked Washington enough to cause the U.S. to withdraw its offer to finance the crucially important Aswan Dam on July 19, 1956. Nasser needed the funds desperately because the dam was an important part of his economic policy. Eventually, in 1958 the USSR helped, donating as much as a third of the required amount as gift. The construction of the Aswan Dam was completed in 1970 although it began filling in 1964. The reservoir was named Lake Nasser. It is huge: 480 km long and 16 km wide, covering an area of approximately 6,000 sq.km. (about the size of Delaware). But at first, Nasser decided to nationalize the Suez Canal and use the proceedings to finance the project, which he did on 26 July.

The canal is a crucial link in the global trade and shipping. Thousands of ships pass through its 163 km annually on the shortest route between Europe and Asia. It was built in a decade, completed in 1869 by a French company, and was initially owned by France and Egypt. However, to relieve its heavy debt burden, Egypt sold its share to Britain, and in 1882, British troops arrived to protect the imperial connection to India. The right to maintain these forces was secured with a treaty in 1936. Egypt renounced this treaty in 1951, but British troops took control by force anyway. In 1956, Egypt reached an agreement that promised free passage and the right to re-occupy if necessary. The last British troops had left just before Nasser nationalized the canal, which further infuriated the government.

The canal was important both as a shipping lane and as an investment of British and French banks. In Eden's words, Nasser could not be allowed to "have his hand on our windpipe." The British and the French resolved to evict Nasser and restore their control of the canal even though Nasser offered to compensate the stockholders.

The problem were the Americans. Eisenhower, although not a big fan of Nasser's and his pro-Soviet antics, was not fond of the imperialist impulses of his European allies. There was no way that he would agree to support the eviction by force, not to mention that he was engaged by the Soviets stirring in Eastern Europe. Despite Eisenhower's repeated warnings against the use of force, the British and the French then went behind the back of their American ally into secret talks with Israel.

Israel was ready to talk. Nasser had blockaded the Gulf of Aqaba and closed

the canal to Israeli shipping, severing both vital links to the outside world. His growing popularity was also perceived as a threat because it eroded the deterrent posture by seeming to unite the Arabs against Israel. The nationalization of the canal provided the opportunity Israel needed: its interest in removing Nasser now coincided with British and French regional goals.

When the talks about establishing international control of the canal failed, Israel accused Egypt of preparing an attack and invaded the Sinai peninsula on October 29, almost simultaneous with the Soviet invasion of Hungary. The rapid advance of the IDF caught co-conspirators unprepared and they rushed to condemn the invasion and demanded the immediate cessation of hostilities. They issued an ultimatum to both sides warning them to withdraw within 10 miles from the canal and asking Egypt to allow a temporary occupation of the canal zone to safeguard it. As expected, Nasser refused and on the 31st Anglo-French forces attacked Egypt, capturing Port Said and Port Fuad by the 5th of November. Israel occupied the Gaza Strip, and controlled the entire Sinai peninsula, including the Straits of Tiran.

The Egyptian army was shattered. Alarmed by the possibility of Soviet intervention on Nasser's behalf (Hungary had provided ample proof that the USSR was not above using tanks despite Khrushchev's recent denunciation of Stalin) and infuriated by the duplicitous behavior of the allies, Eisenhower led the U.N. in condemning the attack and calling on Britain and France to withdraw their troops immediately. He did not limit himself to words, but put pressure on the pound sterling, made \$1 billion IMF loan contingent on a cease-fire, and threatened to embargo oil supplies. All of this while rattling nukes and warning the Soviets to stay away.

On November 8, hostilities ended and on the 21st the U.N. peacekeepers arrived in the canal zone to separate the belligerents. The Anglo-French forces left in December and on March 1, 1957 Israel agreed to withdraw from the Gaza Strip and the Sinai. Two good-faith agreements were eventually concluded. The first, between Nasser and U.N. Secretary General Hammarskjold, affirmed that Egypt had the right to remove the U.N. forces but only after the General Assembly had had the opportunity to determine that they had completed their mission. The second, between John Dulles and Golda Meir, pledged that the U.S. would regard an attempt to blockade the Straits of Tiran as an act of war against which Israel could use force to defend itself but only after informing the U.S. of its intentions.

One other consequence of the Suez War was the Israeli Supreme Court decision ruling that soldiers had to disobey illegal orders. This came about as a result of a massacre perpetrated by the Israeli Border Police at the Arab village of Kfar Kassem (10/29/56) where 49 civilians, over half of them women and children, were killed.

The war ended ignominiously for the British and the French. The military action was the last twitch of the dying British Empire. Prime Minister Eden's resignation sealed the end of the imperial dream and conclusively demonstrated

that Britain could no longer operate foreign policy contrary to the interests of the Americans. The Arab regimes friendly to Britain were shaken to their core. The rift in the Anglo-American alliance, however, was short-lived because soon the U.S. found itself neck-deep in the Middle East.

The plummeting British prestige and the end of their involvement in the region created a power vacuum in the Middle East that the Americans feared the Soviets would try to fill through their own proteges. In January 1957, Eisenhower laid the foundation of all future U.S. policy in the Middle East by announcing his Doctrine. He accused the Russians of secretly coveting the Middle East, that they would not stop at anything to achieve their goals, and that the U.S. would support everyone who resisted communist aggression in the region.

As it was wont to do, the U.S. mistook regional nationalist rivalries for communist encroachments. This produced the predictable result: any government claiming to oppose communism could receive American aid, and anyone that could not get it could instead turn to the Soviets. By turning the Middle East into a theater of superpower rivalry, the U.S. ensured that the local leaders would exploit both superpowers by pitting them one against the other in an effort to obtain the best possible deal. The doctrine also initiated the gradual movement of the U.S. toward overt support for Israel for the democracy could always convincingly claim to be a dependable ally of the West against communism.

Unfortunately, there was enough food for these suspicions to grow. Soviet standing in the Arab world improved significantly because of the active political support the Russians rendered during the Suez War (they even issued a thinly veiled threat to bomb London). The USSR had defended Egypt's sovereignty and when the Soviets replenished the military arsenal lost in the war, the Arabs drew even closer. The era of imperialism had ended but the Cold War had arrived.

Despite its costs to Egypt, in the end, the Suez War strengthened Nasser. He was seen as having successfully defied two imperial powers and, because the American pressure on its allies was unknown, as having stood up to one of the superpowers. His prestige in the Arab world soared, causing additional anxiety both to its status quo rulers and Israel. Furthermore, possession of the Suez Canal, whose nationalization was greeted with considerable public enthusiasm, turned Egypt into a formidable regional power. The war also confirmed Israel's image in the Arab world as an imperialist tool that was bent on expansion but too weak to attack by itself. This fueled the flames of anti-Zionism (never quelled to begin with) and undermined Israel's deterrent posture even more.

On the other hand, Nasser knew not to believe his own propaganda. He knew that the Egyptian army had been routed: the Israelis had achieved all of their objectives 100 hours after the outbreak of hostilities at a cost of 213 killed as opposed to about 3,000 Egyptian casualties. He continued his support for Palestinian guerillas but overall cooperated with the UNEF in the Sinai and allowed the passage of Israeli ships through the Straits of Tiran (many of these secretly carried oil from Iran).

However, extolling his fighting prowess did not come without a price: eventually the public opinion turned more belligerent and demanded another round with Israel. Nasser attempted to walk a fine line between satisfying his countrymen and fellow Arab regimes, especially the exceptionally bellicose Syrians, and not provoking Israel whose military might he was well aware of. His brinkmanship finally led him over the brink when the Israelis concluded that an Egyptian attack was imminent and preempted in June 1967, achieving their greatest victory and setting the stage for the entire problem that is still unresolved today.

#### **4 The Six Day War**

The year 1958 saw major disturbances in the region. First, a revolution in Iraq toppled the eastern branch of the Hashemite monarchy leaving King Hussein wobbling on his Jordanian throne. King Faisal's short-sighted anti-Nasserism and failure to break with the British over the Suez War were so contrary to popular moods that his end was practically ensured despite the liberal use of repression. Iraq began cooperating with the USSR. Second, a civil war in Lebanon almost overthrew its government which was saved by an American intervention under the Eisenhower Doctrine when it appealed for help in defending itself against pro-Nasser forces.

Nasser concentrated on exporting his blend of nationalism and socialism to the other Arab states. In early 1958 he agreed to the creation of the United Arab Republic (UAR) which united Egypt and Syria into a single state. Although it was the Syrians who approached him with the idea because they were afraid of being overthrown by communists, Nasser assumed the initiative and Egypt soon dominated the new country, installing its own military regime and upsetting the Syrians.

However, Arab public opinion approved of the union and soon began clamoring for a military liberation of Palestine. Israel appeared to be in a precarious position, pressed on two sides now by a single hostile Arab state. Things nearly came to head in 1960 when Israel provoked a clash on the Syrian border by trying to cultivate the Demilitarized Zone. As the situation escalated, the Soviets warned Nasser that Israel was planning an invasion. Although this was neither true nor the first time the Russians had issued such warnings, Nasser sent two divisions into the Sinai and told the UNEF to prepare to vacate the region should hostilities break out.

The Israelis panicked and mobilized as diplomats frantically searched for a solution. War appeared imminent until March when the Egyptian troops quietly left the Sinai. The surprise deployment had caught the Israelis unprepared and underlined their vulnerability to sudden attack. While Nasser scored a diplomatic triumph, his very success ensured that Israel would be extremely nervous the next time Egypt attempted hostile moves in the region. As usual, the highest concern was deterrence, whose success is predicated on the opponent expecting swift and determined retaliation for any encroachments on the status quo.

Nasser had just shown that Egypt could poke and probe and that Israel was not prepared to respond.

Despite this success, the UAR was short-lived. In 1961, the Syrian military finally rebelled and broke up the UAR, dashing the hope for a pan-Arab state. Still, Nasser was undeterred in pursuit of his vision of Arab unity under his aegis. In 1962 a military coup in Yemen ousted its leader al-Badr who rallied various tribes and with the generous help of Saudi Arabia and Jordan launched a civil war to regain his throne. The new military regime turned to Nasser who seized the chance to stab at the old order.

This began the disastrous Egyptian involvement in this vicious internecine conflict that lasted for six years and kept over 70,000 of its best troops bogged down against resourceful guerilla fighters. Instead of promoting Arab unity, the Yemeni war split the Middle East into two camps, pitting the traditionalist regimes against Nasserite radicalism, and witnessing the use of chemical weapons.

The only issue on which the Arabs remained united was Israel. The vitriolic anti-Israel propaganda continued to emanate unabated from the Arab capitals. Israel's apprehension steadily mounted as the Soviets supplied their new friends with arms in astounding quantities. Frequent incursions (from the Jordanian side) of Palestinian guerillas caused endless friction because Israel had no choice but to retaliate against Jordan even though the Palestinians were actually based in Syria. On the whole, however, the Arabs were busy with their inter-Arab affairs and were too preoccupied with those to plan a systematic invasion of Israel. However, this did not imply that they would not jump at an opportunity if one presented itself.

By 1965, IDF intelligence had concluded that the Arabs were preparing to force a showdown, and it could come in the form of another blockade of the straits or an attempt to divert the Jordan River. The terrorist incursions intensified, and the Syrians became more vigorous in their shelling from atop the Golan Heights. Some, like Yitzhak Rabin, favored a preemptive strike against Syria arguing that the time was especially propitious because of Arab disunity. Prime Minister Eshkol agreed, and the Israeli Air Force went into action dealing a blow on the Syrian installations. The Syrians resolved to procure more weapons and change tactics: by supporting Palestinian guerillas and goading Egypt into assuming the front lines of a confrontation they could get the benefits of anti-Israeli policy at a considerably lower risk to themselves.

Nasser found himself hemmed in by his own eloquence. The Palestinian raids that he had supported to great success with the public now threatened to yank the leadership from Egypt or else force it into an open confrontation with Israel when the latter inevitably retaliated. The timing was not good for the Egyptian army was bogged down in Yemen and unprepared for a showdown. Nasser denounced the recently formed Islamic League (Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran) claiming that the Arabs could destroy Israel in less than two weeks if they had been united but adding cautiously that this could only be done with an attack from

Syrian and Jordan. Having washed his hands, at least for the time being, he proclaimed full support for the Palestinians and quietly arrested all members of their military wing in Egypt and Gaza. Nasser appeared determined to reap all political benefits from the conflict with Israel without actually risking war.

It was not to be. King Hussein of Jordan also found himself goaded inexorably toward war by the force of public opinion. The king had been unable to stop the terrorist attacks from his soil and quite helpless against IDF reprisals. Publicly, he supported the PLO but privately he talked to the Israelis for practical arrangements that would reduce the likelihood of war between the two states. When the PLO called for the overthrow of the Hashemite dynasty, Hussein arrested Palestinian activists and closed the PLO office in Jordan. The Palestinians were as much a threat to his rule as they were to Israel's existence. The king appealed to Egypt for help in stopping the PLO from provoking a clash with Israel but Nasser ignored him. After all, the progressive Egyptian leader was not about to support a reactionary illegitimate ruler or squander the political benefits provided by championing the Palestinian cause.

The situation began to simmer with tension when the Soviets openly began supporting the Arabs against "colonialist Zionism." With America distracted by Vietnam, Brezhnev seems to have concluded that it was time for the Soviets to restore some of the international prestige it had lost in the Caribbean. The Soviets threatened Israel not to invade Syria in May 1966 even though there were no such plans. Desperate rejections and assurances by the Israelis did not help. By conjuring up the specter of invasion and issuing a public threat, the Soviets could boast of having prevented a Zionist plot as proof of their dedication to the Arab cause. It was diplomacy on the cheap but it frightened the Israelis sufficiently to force them to limit retaliatory strikes to the West Bank.

In November 1966, a large Israeli force mounted a reprisal in the Hebron area. Near the village of Samu' it came into contact with Jordanian convoy, which it ambushed and destroyed but not before the surgical strike had turned into a real battle. The operation backfired as the Palestinians demanded the overthrow of King Hussein who was eventually forced to put down their demonstrations by force. The U.S. also registered vehement displeasure with the Israeli action because Hussein was one of the few remaining friends America had in the region.

Egypt denounced Hussein for allowing Samu' and very soon their bickering produced a gaping rift between the two countries. Amman hurled bitter recriminations at Nasser and taunted him for hiding behind the UNEF whose existence the Egyptian leader had carefully kept secret from his own countrymen. Nasser started to contemplate removal of UNEF from the Sinai and perhaps another closure of the Straits of Tiran. Both of these, however, were too dangerous and provocative, and so he sat tight trying to ignore the Palestinian problem for as long as possible.

He had not figured the Syrians. Under the Soviet umbrella, the Syrians became more adventurous and initiated a series of attacks on Israeli kibbutzim

from the Golan Heights. These and the overt support for Palestinian raids became so obvious that eventually even the Americans got impatient with them. Even though Israel was afraid of provoking a full-scale war that might draw in the Soviet Union, on April 7, 1967 the Israeli Air Force took off to neutralize Syrian artillery in the Golan Heights. When Syrian MiGs engaged them, the IAF shot down six of them and indulged in an ill-conceived victory overflight of Damascus, which mortified and enraged the Syrians.

The Egyptians failed to intervene in support of the Syrians despite their defense pact. More mutual recriminations followed and inter-Arab relations deteriorated just as al-Fatah increased its attacks on Israel and Israeli public opinion began pressing the government to take revenge on the Syrians. Ironically, Arab disunity created an opportunity for the Palestinians to escalate the tensions and compel the various regimes to out-champion each other for their cause. This further destabilized the situation and played Egypt and Jordan into Syrian hands as well. When repeated attempts to secure a common front with Egypt failed, Hussein continued goading Nasser in the hope that this would take the pressure off Jordan. Somewhat paradoxically, the Arab leaders were driving each other into a showdown with Israel that neither of them wanted.

The Soviets provided the spark that lit the conflagration when they informed Sadat that Israel was massing troops on the Syrian border in preparation for an attack. This was a lie and it was not the first time they had tried to stir trouble in this way. This time, however, Nasser either believed them or chose to pretend to believe them. At any rate, he decided to demonstrate resolve by sending Egyptian troops into the Sinai. He was in no position to attack Israel while fighting in Yemen, and consequently he tried to ensure that Israel would not take his action as a preparation for war. To this end, he sent the troops openly hoping that this would serve the dual purpose of deterring aggression against Syria without provoking a preemptive strike against Egypt. Nasser failed to anticipate how events would take a life of their own as the countries began sliding down the precipice to disaster.

Emboldened by the outpour of public support for his move into the Sinai, Nasser decided to up the stakes and demanded the withdrawal of UNEF forces. The U.N. Secretary General U Thant capitulated without so much as asking the General Assembly to consider the matter as per the original agreement. The U.N. force was withdrawn eliminating the last shield Israel had against Egypt. Predictably, the anti-Israeli voices escalated their rhetoric: now that the U.N. was not protecting the Zionist entity, the time had come to wipe it out in war. Caught in the momentum of his success, Nasser blockaded the Straits of Tiran again on May 22, cutting off all Israeli shipping and stopping the covert supply of Iranian oil.

This was a huge mistake for it marked a point of no return in the crisis. Israel had always maintained that closure of the straits was a *casus belli* against which Israel was free to respond with force in self-defense. Nasser was clearly unprepared for war, and hence one is drawn to the conclusion that he must have

hoped for some sort of diplomatic resolution of the crisis, perhaps an intervention by the superpowers that would allow him to escape with his reputation intact. But the events were gathering a momentum of their own and he was soon swept in the maelstrom that he helped unleash, a good example of just how dangerous brinkmanship can be.

As soon as Nasser gave the appearance for preparing for a military solution of the Zionist problem, the Arab leaders rallied around Egypt. The Arab forces began mobilizing, reaching over a quarter of a million troops with 2,000 tanks and 700 aircraft. Israel had gone on alert three weeks previously and was reeling under the intense pressure. Rabin suffered a nervous breakdown that put him out of commission for a while. Desperately, the Israelis tried to get President Johnson to intervene somehow and compel Nasser to open the straits. The Americans preferred negotiations and warned Israel that if it decided to preempt it would be alone.

Negotiations went nowhere and there was no time for patience. The Soviets were supplying the Arabs with massive amounts of arms. On the 30th King Hussein suddenly flew to Cairo and Jordan signed a defense pact with Egypt. The choir clamoring for Israel's destruction reached a crescendo with Iraq joining it. The Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian armies swelled with contributions from Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and even distant Algeria. The Israelis panicked and pressed America once more to step in and diffuse the crisis or, failing that, let Israel preempt. In response, the U.S. imposed an arms embargo on the region, further worsening Israel's ability to withstand a military attack.

Israel's situation became untenable. The country was being asked to stay put and allow itself to be attacked as a condition of international support. The U.S. estimated blithely that Israel would be able to absorb an initial strike and then defeat the Arabs anyway within days. The massive civilian casualties that such an attack would inflict did not figure in these calculations. Neither did Israel's concern with the safety of the nuclear reactor at Dimona which had been overflown by Egyptian fighters on several occasions.

The Yom Kippur War of 1973 is a good example that while Israel could defeat the Arabs even after allowing itself to be attacked, such victory would be costly and cause deep and lasting societal anxiety. No leader could ever be excused for exposing his citizens to a deliberate attack by an enemy. This war also demonstrates vividly the consequences of losing the credibility of the deterrent posture. Israel's decision to preempt had both military and political reasons. Militarily it made sense to take the initiative if war would come anyway and spare the civilians needless suffering. Politically, it would enhance its deterrent threat by demonstrating the might of the IDF and the readiness to use force to defend the country's interests.

On the other hand, Washington's pressure seemed to bear fruit when Nasser agreed to send his vice-president to discuss a diplomatic resolution. It may have been possible to avert war but Israel's preemptive strike came two days before his scheduled arrival. Having sowed the seeds of war, having placed Israel into

an impossible quandary, and having incited Arab public opinion for blood and destruction of Israel, Nasser had to reap the fruits of his dangerous policies.

On June 5, 1967 the Israeli Air Force attacked air bases throughout Egypt and destroyed almost the entire Egyptian air force on the ground. Israel had tried to limit the conflict and had promised Jordan that it would not attack as long as the Jordanians did not initiate hostilities. However, when the Jordanian radars picked up aircraft flying from Egypt to Israel, they began shelling West Jerusalem. It turned out that the planes were Israeli fighters returning from their mission in Egypt. They swung around and dealt a devastating blow on the Jordanian air force before continuing to Syria and achieving the same success.

The mastery of the skies opened the way for the ground invasion. Israeli tanks rolled into the Sinai and captured the entire peninsula stopping at the eastern bank of the Suez canal. The IDF drove out the Jordanian forces from Jerusalem and expelled them from the West Bank completely. The cease-fire stopped the fighting with the Egyptians on the 9th, allowing the IDF to turn its attention to the Syrians. By the 11th, the Israelis had conquered the Golan Heights as well. In a mere six days, Israel had dealt a shattering blow to the Arabs.

The stunning victory was not costless to the Israelis. The casualties were a bit over 3,000 of which about 780 were killed. The air force also lost a quarter of its aircraft. The stunning defeat was even costlier to the Arabs, who had suffered a combined total of 20,000 casualties, with Egypt losing about 80% of its air force and armor.

However, it was the war's aftermath that proved historic. About 300,000 new Palestinian refugees fled the war zones in Gaza and the West Bank. Jordan had relieved itself of some of the troublesome Palestinians but Israel found itself ruling over an Arab population of a million and a half. This raised the first questions about how the country was going to maintain its predominantly Jewish composition while preserving its democratic character.

Israel swelled in size almost tripling its territorial holdings. In addition to the entire Jerusalem, it now held the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and the Golan Heights. All three Arab belligerents lost territories in this war. In addition, the Egyptians lost revenues from the oil field in the Sinai and shipping through the canal which was closed until 1975.

The *blitzkrieg* had revealed the corruption and incompetence of the Arab regimes, some of which (Nasser's) had invested heavily in their new progressive ways. Now all the boasts seemed hollow and the military regimes appeared no better than their predecessors. Just like the 1948 war exposed the losers to the wrath of their publics, the Six Day War triggered the chain of events that led to the fall of the Iraqi (1968) and Syrian (1970) regimes.

The success in the war conveyed an aura of invincibility on the IDF that eventually turned into arrogance for which Israel paid dearly in 1973. In the meantime, the one-sided victory allowed Israel to dictate the terms of peace and permitted it to indulge in intransigence, often refusing to negotiate with the defeated Arabs. Of course, history is replete with examples of victors not heeding

the demands of the vanquished. However, history also shows that this usually provokes the defeated to seek revenge. On the other hand, the Arabs themselves were loath to deal with Israel from a position of weakness. They resolved to tip the scales in their favor, which of course meant another war.

However, the Palestinians finally became thoroughly disillusioned with the Arab states that had not only failed to secure the destruction of Israel but also managed to lose additional territories. The Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) concluded that Palestinians would have to take matters into their own hands. Yasser Arafat, the leader of al-Fatah became chairman of the PLO in 1969, a position which he has maintained to the present.

The Palestinians eschewed entanglements with fashionable causes like communism, pan-Arabism, or Ba'athism but instead concentrated on a simple nationalist message: recover the entire Palestinian land and establish an independent state there. This was a turning point for the region because it led to the establishment of a Palestinian national identity separate from the surrounding Arab states. Al-Fatah rejected Israel's right to exist and preached armed struggle against the Jewish state until its destruction and the expulsion of all Jews from Palestine. Consequently, the PLO refused to endorse almost all of the agreements and resolutions that involved Israel one way or another. The armed struggle quickly degenerated into a worldwide orgy of terrorism against Israel and its sympathizers.

U.N. Resolution 242 set the terms of Israeli withdrawal from the occupied lands in exchange for peace. It had two provisions, "withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict," and "termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats of acts of force." Not a single word on the fate of the Palestinians except the need to achieve "a just settlement of the refugee problem." Egypt, Jordan, and Israel accept the resolution but Syria and the Palestinians did not.

The resolution's text was a bit murky: it did not require withdrawal from *all the territories* conquered in the war, only some of them. How many has been a continued bone of contention, with each side advancing its own interpretation. For the Arabs, this meant immediate and full withdrawal from 100% of the territories. For the Israelis, this meant peace talks followed by a withdrawal that still allowed Israel to keep some lands to ensure secure boundaries. The Americans did not share either position. Instead, they endorsed a view that the text allowed minor adjustments in the West Bank, along with the establishment of demilitarized zones in the Sinai and Golan Heights.

Two years of negotiations ended in deadlock. The Arabs would not yield until Israel withdrew and Israel saw no need to concede given that it had just won a war. For their part, the Palestinians rejected the resolution altogether because it legitimized the existence of Israel. Slowly, the frustrated Americans began

drawing closer to the Israeli position. By 1969, the Vietnam War had produced its casualty in the White House as Johnson made way for Nixon.

The Kissinger/Nixon policy embodied in the Nixon Doctrine required that America reduced its military involvement throughout the world by unloading some of the defense burdens on its allies. The U.S. sought containment on the cheap because it could not afford to continue its previous policies. Israel was the natural choice to stem communism in the region: staunchly democratic, pro-Western, and militarily invincible, its advantages tempted the U.S. administration. Israel evolved into a strategic partner of the U.S., which offered diplomatic support, economic assistance, and military equipment for sale. Naturally, this did nothing to excite the Israelis into being more accommodating with the Arabs.

## **5 The War of Attrition and Yom Kippur**

By 1969 Nasser had become thoroughly pessimistic about Israel's willingness to get out of the territories without a prior commitment of the Arabs to peace. None of the defeated belligerents was prepared to offer such a commitment. Egypt launched the War of Attrition in an attempt to break the diplomatic deadlock and force Israel out of the Sinai. Israel, after consulting with the U.S., resolved to attempt to topple Nasser yet again and began bombing Egypt. It backfired just like the previous try: the Egyptians reacted by rallying around the president who became even more defiant. In addition, the Soviets hurried to prop their friend by replacing all the equipment lost in the war, supplying modern weapons, and sending officers to train the Egyptian army.

Nasser abandoned pan-Arabism and focused on his own survival in cooperation with King Hussein whom he had repeatedly and consistently denounced previously. In July 1970, Secretary of State Rogers managed to get the two countries and Israel to agree to a peace plan that involved a cease-fire. Although this did not produce peace, it did lead to an end of the war of attrition.

In the meantime, tensions escalated in Jordan again because the King finally lost control of the restless Palestinians. In September, Palestinian terrorists from PFLP hijacked four civilian airliners and landed them in Jordan where they proceeded to flaunt their defiance of the Hashemite regime. On the 15th, Hussein ordered the army to restore order.

The conflict turned into the carnage known as Black September during which the Jordanian army killed about 3,000 Palestinians and bombed refugee camps. The PLO moved to Lebanon and took its campaign of Palestinian terror around the world, massacring civilians at airports, murdering the entire Israeli Olympic team at the 1972 Munich games, and continuing with airliner hijackings, bombings, and suicide raids into Israel.

Israel proved its strategic value to the U.S. when it aided King Hussein and forced Syrian to withdraw its military support for the PLO during the crisis. Nasser mediated the conflict between the Jordanian army and the Palestinians

and worked out a cease-fire arrangement in intense negotiations. On September 28, the exhausted Egyptian president succumbed to heart attack. Although Nasser's acceptance of the Rogers plan may have signaled his preparation to move toward some peaceful resolution of the conflict with Israel, it was his successor, Anwar Sadat, who attempted to do this.

Egypt was sinking fast: the active state of belligerency with Israel required enormous outlays of maintaining military readiness that the state, deprived of revenues from tourism or the Suez Canal, could not afford. The only way out of the desperate economic straits was through a settlement with Israel, a conclusion similar to the one Gorbachev reached for the USSR's relationship with the U.S. twenty years later.

When the Soviets refused to supply the Egyptian army with offensive weapons because they were afraid that Sadat might be tempted to use them to threaten Israel. Such a tactic could easily provoke the IDF into yet another war instead of delivering the diplomatic resolution that the Egyptians wanted. Infuriated, Sadat decided to turn to the Americans for help. He thought that only the U.S. could bring enough pressure to bear on Israel to get it to offer some concessions. However, Nixon and Kissinger supported Golda Meir in her rejection of the peace feelers.

In part because of his frustration with the Russians, and in part to demonstrate his independence of the Soviet bloc in the hope that this would make him more attractive to the U.S., Sadat expelled 20,000 Soviet military advisors from Egypt in July 1972. Unfortunately, this important political gesture was lost amidst the fury unleashed against the Arabs by the Palestinian terrorist operation in Munich. There was going to be no help forthcoming and therefore no concessions from Israel.

Sadat's choices were exhausted and down to two: sue for peace on Israel's terms or redress the military imbalance by war. He had repeatedly threatened war for years always insisting that unless the U.S. forced Israel to withdraw from all the occupied territories, Egypt would fight. He was ignored: after all, Egypt was in no condition to win a war against Israel. The small probability that the Soviets would help evaporated in 1972 as well, the Russians were more interested in their détente with the U.S. than in getting dragged into another Middle East conflict.

In April 1973, Sadat warned yet again that Egypt would go to war to force resolution of the diplomatic impasse but nobody believed him. Israel would not budge, so war was the last resort. Israel had become convinced of its military invincibility and believed its deterrence posture was perfect. No sane Arab leader would dare attack such a formidable opponent, not when Israel had the support of the American superpower while the Arabs lacked the support of the Soviet one.

The Israelis were mistaken. On October 6, 1973, Egypt and Syria launched a simultaneous surprise attack on Israel. The Israelis were caught unprepared, many of the IDF reservists were celebrating Yom Kippur and were away from

their stations. When the Syrian tanks rolled across the Golan Heights, their numerical superiority was 1,400 to 180; fewer than 500 Israeli soldiers faced 80,000 Egyptians in the Sinai. Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Libya, Algeria, Sudan, and Morocco supported the effort. The Soviet Union also pledged its support for the Arabs' "just struggle against the imperialist Israeli aggression" (standard terminology of the times).

In the final analysis, the Yom Kippur War was provoked by an insidious combination of Egypt's economic weakness that prodded Sadat to seek some settlement with Israel, an inability to negotiate wholly on Israel's terms, and Israel's intransigence due to its military superiority and American support. It is doubtful that the Arab leaders believed they could win the war and hence achieve their stated goal of Israel's complete destruction. They only needed to bloody Israel's nose and score a diplomatic victory by demonstrating (both to Israel and America) that it was not invincible and therefore had to be more accommodating.

This time, Israeli intelligence had failed to give sufficient warning and before mobilization plans kicked into action, the Arabs drove back IDF in a surprising show of strength. The Egyptians burst across the canal and took a strip of land about 15 km deep on the east side. The Syrians attacked across the Golan Heights, whittling the Israeli defenses down to a single tank. The situation became desperate, the myth of Israeli military invincibility was shattered.

Despite the shock, Israel recovered sufficiently fast to check the aggression before the Arab forces could reach major population centers and wreak havoc on the civilians. Israel's reservists were called up and within days, the IDF managed to regroup, and then began pursuing the Arabs back. By the 11th, the Syrians were pushed back across the border, and IDF crossed into Syria themselves, reaching within 40 kms of Damascus before the fighting stopped. In the Sinai, a division led by Ariel Sharon bridged the canal into Africa, cutting the Egyptian supply lines, and encircling their army. The surrounded Egyptian army was threatened with complete annihilation, opening all Egypt to invasion.

Both superpowers began airlifting supplies to their respective friends. However, the Israeli advance was inexorable and no amount of arms could stop the destruction of the Egyptians in the Sinai. The Soviets panicked—their protégé was being pulverized. Brezhnev declared that if the U.S. would not help broker an immediate cease-fire, the USSR would act alone and impose one. This was a dramatic change in the Soviet's position which had rebuffed American efforts to negotiate a cease-fire while the Arab armies were ascendant.

Nixon (through Kissinger) warned the Russians to stay out—U.S. nuclear forces went on alert and it appeared that the Middle East would drag the world into the conflagration of a war between the superpowers. Simultaneously, however, the U.S. pressured Israel into accepting a cease-fire. The reluctant Israelis, who depended heavily on American support, accepted UNSC's Resolution 338 of October 22, which demanded an immediate stop to all fighting.

Hostilities ended on October 24. While Israel doubtless won the military victory, its diplomatic and political position was grievously injured. Sadat had

succeeded in entangling the two superpowers and hence could expect that they would bring sufficient pressure to bear on Israel to be more accommodating. The specter of a nuclear war between the U.S. and the USSR raised the stakes of the Arab-Israeli conflict and convinced both superpowers that they would have to be more restrained in the support of their respective allies.

The war also taught the U.S. the bitter lesson Europe had to learn in 1956: support for Israel could cost them the much-needed Arab oil. When the U.S. supplied weapons to Israel, the Arab members of OPEC reduced the oil production by 5% with the Saudis cutting their exports to America entirely. This action threatened to strangle the Western economies. Formed in 1960 to counter the dominance of US/British/Dutch oil companies, OPEC managed to quadruple the price of oil by 1974. On January 2, 1974, Nixon lowered the maximum speed limit to 55 mph to conserve gasoline.

The Europeans, who imported 80% of their oil from the Middle East and the Japanese, who imported 90%, began switching from pro-Israeli to pro-Arab policies. Only the US remained committed to Israel (it imported 12% from the Middle East). But the oil threat remained and even the shah of Iran, Washington's most trusted friend, remarked that it was "only fair that [the U.S.] should pay more for oil. Let's say... 10 times more." Israel embarked on its short journey toward alienation from previously friendly countries.

In addition to the political damage, Israel suffered a severe psychological shock. Even though it had won yet again, this victory had been exceedingly costly and lacked the skewed distribution of casualties of the previous ones. Israel lost almost 3,000 men and women and while the combined total loss of the Arab armies was about 20,000 (same as the Six Day War), Israel's losses had tripled. The IDF lost some of its luster and with it went the absolute deterrence posture that Israel had come to rely on.

Israel was ready to talk and the superpowers were ready to provide the forum. In intense shuttle-diplomacy Kissinger worked out the disengagement agreements between Israel and Egypt (1/28/74) and Israel and Syria. The Israeli forces withdrew from the west bank of the canal zone, breaking the encirclement of the Egyptian Third Army. Israel further withdrew 20 km east of the canal and a U.N. buffer zone was established to separate the belligerents. The cease-fire with the Syrians did not result in territorial changes in the Golan Heights.

In the next agreement (Sinai II, 9/4/75), Israel committed to pull out of the Giddi and Mitla passes and relinquish the Sinai oil fields (which would have made the country nearly independent from foreign oil). Although this was not strategically or economically advantageous to Israel, the American pledge of military assistance and economic aid made the deal possible. Although most of the Sinai remained in Israel's hands, this was the second step toward normalizing the relations with Egypt even though Rabin seems to have agreed to it primarily to please the Americans who were eager to reassert their influence in Egypt. Nobody expected the bold move by Sadat three years later.

On the Arab side, the war was a political triumph for Sadat in spite of the unfavorable military outcome. He attempted to use his popularity to implement economic reforms and dismantle some of the social welfare programs that were inefficient drains on the economy. This struck the wrong chord and caused anti-government riots in 1977 forcing Sadat to order the army to put them down. He desperately needed a solution to the country's persistent economic woes.

It was not going to be a military solution. Despite the heavy defenses deployed to protect the Aswan Dam during the Yom Kippur War, the Israeli Air Force had managed to get through, and had paint-bombed it to demonstrate the capability to destroy it. Because almost all of Egypt's population lives in the Nile valley, destroying the dam would produce a flood that would obliterate it. The implicit warning contributed to Sadat's decision to pursue peace.

Having convinced himself that America was the key to his problem both with Israel and with the economy, Sadat realigned Egypt with the West and then made his dramatic visit to Jerusalem in November 1977 where he spoke before the Knesset on his desire to make peace. Egypt was tired of the thirty-year old hostilities, had abandoned hope for a military victory, and was ready to recognize Israel's right to exist in return for the lands Egypt had lost in the various wars. Sadat also hoped for a comprehensive settlement that would produce a lasting peace in the Middle East.

He ran into a determined opposition. In Israel, the right-wing Likud Party had replaced the moderate Labor, and discussion shifted from pure security concerns to permanent enlargement of the state. Prime Minister Begin was ready and willing to settle with Egypt and return the Sinai, but he was decidedly unwilling to evacuate the West Bank or even the Gaza Strip. There would be no Palestinian self-determination and no Palestinian state if he could help it. The (specious) argument was that the Palestinians already had a state: Jordan.

In September 1978, Sadat met with Begin at Camp David under the auspices of Jimmy Carter, the new American president whose touching but unrealistic attachment to human rights and somewhat naïve faith in American ability to negotiate everything from continued rapprochement with the USSR to a modus vivendi with Islamic radicals in Iran would damage U.S. credibility and eventually bring Reagan to power.

The negotiations produced two major documents but solved only one problem. The agreement on peace between Israel and Egypt was straightforward and formalized in the treaty of 3/26/79. Egypt recognized Israel's right to exist and promised not to attack it again. In return, Israel returned the entire Sinai Peninsula, dismantled all its settlements there (some forcibly). This was the first land-for-peace exchange in the region. Israel completed the withdrawal in 1982.

The second document titled "A Framework for Peace in the Middle East" reflected Begin's desire to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. Although it provided for the gradual achievement of autonomy for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the language was so ambiguous that almost any interpretation was admissible. Still, the agreement stipulated that U.N. Resolu-

tion 242 would be the basis for the conflict resolution. The Palestinians vehemently rejected the accords: they suspected that it was a plot by Israel to do to them what they had been planning on doing to it. That is, they believed Israel would move to keep both the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, denying them a state. This was unacceptable, of course, because they wanted their state on the entire Palestine with Israel wiped out. This gap could not be bridged at the time.

Without a solution of the Palestinian problem, the Camp David Accords and the treaty of 1979 amounted to a unilateral peace between Israel and Egypt. The premier Arab state had abandoned the Palestinian cause, simultaneously unloading the hassle of managing Gaza on the Israelis. Egypt paid dearly for the peace: it was expelled from the Arab League, had its subsidies by rich oil-producing Arab states cut, and was diplomatically isolated. This drove Egypt into the arms of the Americans, making it ever more dependent on U.S. assistance.

Sadat and Begin shared the Nobel peace prize. Unfortunately, when in the fall of 1981 Sadat cracked down on Muslim organizations, he was assassinated by members of the al-Jihad on October 6. The Islamic extremists were opposed to peace, to negotiations with Israel, to Sadat's pro-Western ways, and to secular society, all reasons, they believed, for the country's economic failure and hopelessness. Sadat's successor, Hosni Mubarak, maintained peace with Israel and continued the persecution of anti-regime Islamic groups.

Perhaps the most important consequence of the 1973 war with impact lasting to this day was the beginning of a crucial change in the character of the regional conflict. As some of the most important Arab states started disengaging from a traditional military rivalry, the Palestinians had to rely increasingly on their own resources. The confrontation entered a phase that was much more difficult to define: instead of defending against Arab armies and Palestinian guerillas, Israel had to defend against an enemy with unlimited goals and ever escalating willingness to use terrorism. While the IDF was well prepared to crush an army it was not nearly as effective in preventing infiltration and terrorist attacks. Terrorism existed before the 1970s, but after that it became the strategy of choice for the Palestinians. It worked: the PLO obtained international recognition for its cause, widespread sympathy, and a series of concessions.