

50th ANNIVERSARY

SIX-DAY WAR

INTRODUCTION TO SIX-DAY WAR POWERPOINT: ISRAEL'S SEARCH FOR PEACE WITH THE PALESTINIANS AND OTHER ARAB NEIGHBORS

Israel has consistently sought to achieve peace with its neighbors. In fact, these efforts for peace predate the creation of the state. In 1937, during the period of the British Mandate, the Palestine Royal Commission (also known as the Peel Commission) recommended partition of the land between the Jordan River and Mediterranean Sea into three parts: a Jewish state; an Arab state with access to Transjordan; and a British area that would consist of Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and a passage to the Mediterranean. While there was debate among Zionist leadership regarding this plan, moderates such as David Ben-Gurion accepted it as the basis for future negotiations. The Arab response, on the other hand, was clear--complete rejection. This pattern—the Zionists willing to negotiate a compromise and the Arab camp refusing to do so—would continue for years to come.

Another potential turning point came in November 1947 when the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 181, the Partition Plan for Palestine. This resolution called for the creation of both a Jewish state and Arab state in what was left of British Mandatory Palestine, and the establishment of a special international administration over Jerusalem. The Zionist leadership welcomed the resolution, but Arab governments rejected it outright. After Resolution 181 was adopted, the General Secretary of the Arab League, Azzam Pasha, was reported in a newspaper as saying, “Personally I hope the Jews do not force us into this war because it will be a war of elimination and it will be a dangerous massacre which history will record similarly to the Mongol massacre or the wars of the Crusades.”

Israel declared independence on May 15, 1948. Its founders declared in the Declaration of Independence that “we extend our hand to all neighboring states in their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness, and appeal to them to establish bonds of cooperation and mutual help with the sovereign Jewish people settled in its own land.” The response from the Arab side was an invasion of Israel on all fronts with the intention to snuff out the fledgling state. Israel's War of Independence lasted until 1949. The armistice reached after this struggle left Jordan in control of much of the territory that had been assigned to the Arab state by Resolution 181. Jerusalem, which per Resolution 181 was to be a separate international zone, was divided; Israel controlled the western side and Jordan controlled the eastern side, including the Old City and its religious sites deeply important to Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

This Six-Day War 50th Anniversary Package was created by the Israel Action Network (IAN), a strategic initiative of The Jewish Federations of North America (JFNA) in partnership with the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA).

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On June 5, 1967, to defend itself against an imminent aggression, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike against the armies of Egypt and Syria. In the period leading up to the war, Egypt, Syria and Jordan signed a mutual defense pact. Israel was surrounded by some 500,000 troops, more than 5,000 tanks and almost 1,000 fighter planes. Egypt had closed off the Red Sea's Tiran Straits to Israeli shipping, which was to an act of war, and Egypt's President Nasser made clear threats against Israel's very existence. Israel implored Jordan to stay out of the fighting, but King Hussein ordered Jordanian forces to move against the Israeli military. Israel therefore initiated its attack in self-defense. In the aftermath of the war, Israel was left in control of Gaza, the West Bank, East Jerusalem, Sinai and the Golan Heights.

After the conclusion of the Six-Day War, the United Nations Security Council Resolution 242 was adopted, calling for "a just and lasting peace" between Israel and its neighbors. In response, eight Arab heads of state met and establish the Khartoum Resolution in September 1967, which called for continued belligerency towards Israel summarized in the "Three No's": no peace, no recognition and no negotiations with Israel.

In the 50 years since 1967, Israel has continued to make significant overtures to achieve peace with its Arab neighbors, particularly the Palestinians. There have been some notable successes. But the long sought-after goal of peace with the Palestinians and with the Arab world, beyond Egypt and Jordan, remains unfulfilled.

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