



WE BELIEVE
IN ISRAEL

Reflections on the Six Day War



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Introduction

The Six Day War was a watershed moment in Middle Eastern history where the balance of power shifted in the region.

The Six Day War was a momentous military victory for Israel, who fought a defensive war and came out on top.

After the closing of the Straits of Tiran by Egypt on 22 May 1967, the expulsion of UN peace keeping soldiers from the Sinai Peninsula and the build-up of Egyptian forces, combined with blood-curdling Egyptian rhetoric about destroying Israel, Israel launched a pre-emptive strike on 5 June 1967. Within six days, Israel had defeated Egypt, Syria and Jordan and captured the Sinai, West Bank, Gaza strip, Golan Heights and East Jerusalem.

Israel returned the Sinai to Egypt in 1979 as part of a comprehensive peace treaty between Egypt and Israel that endures to this day.

Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel in 1994. The agreement stipulated that Jordan would remain the custodian of the Muslim Holy places in the Old City of Jerusalem, which Israel annexed after 1967.

Fifty years on, there is still no Palestinian state and no comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, despite progress with the Oslo Accords of 1993 and the establishment of a Palestinian Authority that paved the way for autonomy in the West Bank and ultimately Israel's complete withdrawal from Gaza.

To mark the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War, We Believe in Israel invited three Israelis to the UK to examine the war's profound significance for Israel and the wider region.

The first speech in this booklet is by Dr Einat Wilf, who spoke to audiences in London and Manchester about what the Six Day War means for Israel and Zionism 50 years on. Dr Wilf is a leading intellectual and original thinker on foreign policy, economics, education, Israel and the Jewish people. She was a Member of Knesset from 2010-2013 and was foreign policy advisor to Deputy Prime Minister Shimon Peres. She has also written four books exploring key issues in Israeli society.

The second speech is by leading Israeli academic, Professor Asher Susser, who discussed how the Six Day War transformed the Middle East. Professor Susser is the Stanley and Ilene Gold Senior Fellow at the Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Tel Aviv University. He is a world-renowned expert on the history and politics of the Middle East and is well known for being able to convey the complexity of Israel's history in a very succinct and clear way. Professor Asher Susser spoke to an audience in London.

The final speech focuses on the question of peace and seeks to humanise the conflict, by returning us to the personal side of Israel's victory. Dr Itzhak Ifat, the middle paratrooper in the iconic David Rubinger photo of the moment the Western Wall was liberated, gives a first-hand account of the fighting and the subsequent reunification of Jerusalem.

Dr Ifat was brought to the UK by We Believe in Israel, the Zionist Federation, the Board of

Deputies of British Jews, and the World Zionist Organisation. He spoke in London, Manchester, Leeds and Birmingham.

This booklet aims to provide a different narrative on the 50th anniversary of the Six Day War. We seek to personalise the conflict and move the discourse away from aggressor and victim, towards thinking about peace with two states for two peoples.

Dr Einat Wilf

50 years after the Six Day War and nearly 70 years since the birth of the State of Israel, I would like to dive into big question and ask 'why don't we have peace?'

I believe in the premise that essentially what the Palestinians want is sovereignty and a state of their own in the West Bank and Gaza, and the day that they will have it is the day that we have peace.

My political upbringing

I grew up in the context of the Israeli Labour Party, in a neighbourhood in Jerusalem called Beit Hakerem. We did not know people who did not vote Labour and could not imagine any decent person not voting Labour.

I grew up in the 80s and early 90s, with the central premise of Labour increasingly around the question of the territories. Labour became more and more associated with the idea of partition and the idea that Labour will be willing to negotiate territories captured in the Six Day War in return for peace with the Arab world and the Palestinians.

The '90s was a time of euphoria for them; Oslo-Madrid, Oslo-Jordan, the handshakes from a manicured lawn, the soaring speeches, and the end of war speeches; there was really a sense that that is it, this is over. After the ending of apartheid in South Africa, and the Good Friday agreement, there was a sense that we are next, there is going to be peace just around the corner.

For many people who came from my background and my thinking, and the same political camp, the year 2000 marked the beginning of the years of political devastation.

Our central premise collapsed.

The year 2000

In the year 2000, Ehud Barak, then Prime Minister of Israel, goes to Camp David and puts forth what was clearly a bold (some would say reckless) offer that would grant the Palestinians liberty, dignity, and a sovereign state of their own in the West Bank and Gaza with the Capital in Jerusalem.

The word yes was nowhere to be found. This repeated itself in 2008 when Olmert made a more far reaching offer, and the word yes was again nowhere to be found.

This was deeply baffling to Israel. In Israel's understanding of history, a people who want a state say yes. It's that simple. They don't go and write op-eds in the New York Review of Books (or the Guardian, to name a British equivalent), they just say yes.

It is Israel's understanding of history because of partition, because of 1947. In 1947 the Zionist leadership was told the following by the United Nations: 'Hi, our predecessors, the League of Nations, we know they offered you the entire land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea in return for your agreement that the entire bigger area of the Mandate will

be used to establish the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. But sorry guys, 25-30 years later, it isn't working out. So you're going to get half, and not only are you getting half, most of it is the Negev desert. And we know you are called the Zionist movement, but you're not getting Zion. Jerusalem is going to be an international protectorate. And we know you are called Jews, which in every language except English retains the 'D' ('Yehudim, Yehudah' [Judah]) so we know you are the Judeans, but you are not getting Judea. Judea will be in the Arab state. So what do you say guys?'

Half, desert, no Zion, no Judea. What does the Zionist Jewish Leadership say? Yes!

It says yes because for the Zionist leadership, the key was a state, sovereignty, dignity, liberty, the ability of the Jewish people to finally govern themselves in their homeland, but not in all. Because of that laser focus on sovereignty, the Jewish people have a state. At the critical moment, the Jewish people said yes. In Israel's understanding of history, a people who want a state say yes. They don't muck around with the details.

So when the Arab Palestinian leadership faced with clear distinct opportunities to end the military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, to be sovereign in a state of their own; the fact that there was no clear yes, that there was no yes at all, clear or not clear, was really baffling to Israel and a lot of Israelis began to ask 'so what is it that they want?'

Not only was the word yes nowhere to be found after the year 2000, but it descended into this bloody mayhem that was called the Second Intifada, but it really was just a bloody massacre. Families and children were being blown up in cafes and on buses; there was really a sense that if you left your home you were playing Russian roulette with your life. Sitting in a café sipping coffee was an act of resistance.

This was happening in Tel Aviv, in Be'er Sheva, in Haifa, all within the Green Line. So why?

What do the Palestinians want?

I remember at that time wanting to find a Palestinian and just ask 'what is it that you want?'

If you want a state for yourself in the West Bank and Gaza, I will fight with you shoulder to shoulder. But if you're basically telling me that more than wanting a state for yourself, you still cannot stomach and accept that me, my people, we will have our state in this land next to you, if you are telling me I have to choose between you and me, between you and us, then I chose us and I have no qualms about it.

There were a lot of essays published at the time and op-eds on the moral devastation of the Israeli left, and I remember thinking, you have to be joking. This was actually a moment of moral clarity; because if this is about our very existence, our very survival, then I choose our own survival. It's a moral choice that I have no qualms about.

During that time, as I was beginning to question and many Israelis were asking 'what is it that the Palestinians want?' I was asked to meet moderate Palestinians. I was a member of the Labour Party, not yet a member of Parliament, but already active in politics, supportive of two states, partition, Palestinian statehood, so a moderate Israeli by those standards, and I was asked to meet moderate Palestinians. And when we met for these weekend workshops, I realised that their moderation was in moderation of resignation.

They were resigned to reality. They said things like 'we get it, you're here,' 'you're powerful,' 'you stole our land.' We had post dinner conversations, and they would start by telling me things like 'the Jewish people are not even a people,' 'states are what people and nations have a right to but you're not a people,' 'you're not a nation, you are merely a religion.'

This is factually wrong and it is also deeply offensive to people like me. I define myself as a devout atheist but for me, me being Jewish is about my solidarity and caring for my people. In Judaism one must not need to be a person of faith to be Jewish and a lot of Jews are indeed non-believers. Arguing that Judaism is only a religion is not only wrong, it is offensive as it excludes so many Jews who are non-religious for whom the Jewish identity is about their belonging to a people and a nation.

The moderate Palestinians would say: 'this thing you say about this country, belonging to you, this land, it is a story you made up to steal our own.' In all variety of ways, to argue that all of that was invented, so that at the end of the 19th century, a small group of people can come to a strip of land to which they had no connection and steal it from those who were there, I felt was going a bit far.

'Because you are not a people and not a nation, you don't have the right to self-determination, you don't have the right to a state and certainly not in this land.'

I came back from these workshops thinking 'so these are the moderates'. And if these are the moderates, then the conflict is far deeper, far broader, and more serious than I was led to believe; thinking it was about borders, settlements, and a Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza. This led me on a journey because I realised me being called moderate and them being called moderate didn't mean the same thing. I was a moderate in the sense that I recognised their right to self-determination in this land as well. But I realised they didn't recognise my right. What they did recognise was my might. They were essentially telling me that the day I no longer have might is the day I no longer have right.

And this for me began a process of seeking Palestinians who will acknowledge and share a vision of peace that is based on the idea that both peoples have a right to the land; that both are indigenous, that neither is a foreigner, and because the other exists, as much as they can lay claim to the entirety of the land, they will have to acknowledge that they will only have some.

I found that it is extremely difficult to find Arab Palestinians who will be partners to that kind of vision. For me in Israel, it is no big deal; I don't need courage to say something as basic as there are Jewish People and Arab Palestinian people and they have a right and we have a right, and neither has a superior or exclusive right, so let's divide. It is a fairly common position. I found one person, a remarkably courageous individual, who would sign on to a statement with me along those lines. I realise that for an Arab Palestinian to say something so basic, they need incredible courage. Why is it so difficult to have that position, certainly openly? Why do they need courage when I don't? Why is it so difficult for them to make such a basic statement of an equal recognition of rights?

It led me to further reflections of what is going on. I don't believe in the concept that one people is morally superior to another. So why is it that they understand things so differently than I do and therefore have such a different position?

Equality

I believe Zionism is one of the world's most inspiring movements. A people, marginalised, discriminated against, persecuted for centuries and millennia, find within themselves the power, the will, to rise up, to take charge of their own fate, to change their destiny, to rebel against the position they were placed in by others, to reclaim their homeland, to build a sovereign state, a truly inspiring story.

But I've learnt that in this life, inspiring and insane are very close. It is an insane story. Theodore Herzl was considered insane by everybody he met.

I think we can agree that anywhere in the world, people who would come and say 'hello' after 2000 years, and 'this is mine,' 'this is my home', would start a conflict. But there is an additional factor. It is not just any people who have come home, it is the Jews. And that matters. It matters because by the time the Jews are coming home politically, claiming sovereignty, the Zionist movement at the

end of the 19th century, the Arabs already have over a millennia in which they were theologically, culturally conditioned to believe that the Jewish people are an inferior religious group that is headed to the dustbin of history. And people who can live with them but as long as they know their place, their place being somewhat sub-level.

Generally, I think all problems in history begin when people you were culturally conditioned to think of as your inferiors one day come up and claim equality. This is part of a lot of the work I do comparing feminism and Zionism and the similarities of previously dispossessed, discriminated against groups, claiming equality and challenging long established power relationships.

If I were to tell the men in this room, you think women are inferior because they can bear children, you would be justifiably horrified by the accusation. But if I were to say men and women here and everywhere, despite claims of equality, still inhabit institutions, structures, norms, language, modes of thinking, that are the legacies of millennia of a power structure based on the norm of the inferiority of women - if you were to say that's not true you would have to be blind. And think about how powerful the legacy of this history is when we are already more than one hundred fifty years into fighting for the equality of men and women, we're actually trying to liberate ourselves from these modes of thinking, and institutions, and norms, and structures, but they still exert so much power over us. Now in the Arab and Islamic world we don't even have an effort to fight against that. So this is still a remarkably powerful element. Even if individual Arabs and Palestinians and Muslims might say "I don't think that." The fact that individuals don't prescribe to that does not mean that you are not part of a whole cultural construct that is based on this idea.

For what are the Jews doing with Zionism? The Jews with Zionism are challenging the entire cultural theological structure of Islam and the Arab world by saying we are equal. The fact that we said no to Mohammed does not mean we are less than you. That's a challenge. Not something you easily accept. We are asking of the Arabs to accept that a people have come home after 2000 years to a land they consider their own; to accept the Jews as their brethren, equal claimants to this land, as a people worthy of self-determination; for this acceptance to take place with a people they have been conditioned to think of as heading to the dustbin of history; and to do all this when the Jews don't have the numbers and you [the Arabs] do.

When we started with this insane story and challenge, we a few tens of thousands. When Israel was born the ratio of Jews to Arabs in the region was 1:50, today it is 1:60, we literally did not make a dent in it. With all the Aliyah, baby-making, fertility treatments, not a dent in this ratio. So they have the numbers and we are coming with a crazy story that challenges their very belief system, of course they are going to say no. This is why the conflict is so deep and so serious and this is why for them the only way to accept the continuing success and growing success of Zionism, militarily, economically, culturally, is by putting it in the context that it is temporary.

But if this is the case, it is so deep, so profound. How can we ever have peace?

In this context the Palestinians are not hapless victims. There is a word now that has become very popular called mansplaining, when men explain what a woman has just said because she wasn't capable of explaining herself, so I am thinking maybe we should have a term of westplaining or westernplaining, when western diplomats and powers explain away what Arabs are saying even though they are saying it clearly. For example when Palestinian Arabs speak of their demand to return to what is today the State of Israel within the Green Line, you hear so many diplomats saying 'they don't mean it, they know they're not coming back.' Why don't they give them the respect of actually listening to what they are saying? And in this context, the Palestinians are not victims, because they are masters of a narrative, at the end of which they win. They are masters of a narrative that says at one point this Zionist entity disappears. And once it disappears and this country goes back to being Arab, we will have a great story to tell. When we persevered, we held on, even under decades of humiliating military occupation, we never compromised, we never agreed to sign any document that meant accepting the legitimacy and presence of this humiliating thing.

Yes, living under the military occupation of Israel is humiliating, but better to suffer the daily humiliation of that than to accept the far greater humiliation of the permanence and legitimacy of a Jewish presence in a land they consider exclusively their own. So how would I know we have moved forward? When we will hear Palestinian and Arab Leaders, including Jordanians and Egyptians, using phrases that say: 'We understand that the Jews have come home, we recognise them as our equal brethren and claimants to this land. We recognise that as we have a right to govern ourselves in this land, they have a right. We accept their historical connection to the land and we are not denying it, but they can't have it all because we're here and we can't have it all because they're here, so we are going to work with them to see how to properly divide the land and live side by side, but we are done thinking they are temporary, and we are done behaving in a way that expresses their temporariness.'

How will the conflict be resolved?

If my analysis of what drives the conflict is correct, then the conflict gets resolved in one of two ways, and it is not the one state two state discussion we have.

One way: they win. They massacre us, they throw us into the sea, they get us to give up and leave. Whatever the way, the Jews go back to being a vast but tiny protected minority in an Arab country or an Arab region and they win. When that happens they'll tell a great story. The story will be 'look, we always knew that this was an aberration, we always knew that this was a humiliation, we knew this was the second crusader state (in Arab mythology, they call Israel the second crusader state, to signify that just like the first crusader stage had a temporary existence of less than a century, so will the second one.) The Palestinians will become heroes. Because they'll be able to tell great stories, we have persisted, we have persevered, but we never compromised. Even in the days that we had to suffer the humiliation of the military occupation, of the Jews, we would never sign onto a piece of paper that would recognise the Jews as the legitimate equal presence in the state. It is a far greater humiliation to sign an agreement that ends this by recognising that the Jews are an equal presence in this land. That's a choice with consequences, but they are not hapless victims.

How does the conflict end with the Jews staying in place?

It only ends when the Arabs get exhausted to the point of realising that we are immovable.

The resolution of the conflict depends on the battle and race of exhaustion; who will exhaust who first? Will the Arabs exhaust the Zionists first? Throwing military invasions, diplomatic war, intellectual war, economic boycotts at us, until the point that we say 'it's not worth it, we're out of here.' Or will we be able to exhaust them to saying 'these Yahuds, [Jews] seem to be going nowhere?'

Over 120 years of Zionism, I can chart an arc of Arab exhaustion, where I can see key points by which there is a bit of a pulling back. They threw military invasions at us, that was put aside, but the economic boycott immediately followed, and the diplomatic boycott continues, and the intellectual warfare continues. So they are still throwing things at us. But, us withstanding them - the Six Day War, and the Yom Kippur War - our ability to create an economy which is actually independent of our geographic location as an isolated country in the Middle East, our ability to fight back on the diplomatic and intellectual warfare is the way that we actually get the other side to finally accept our permanence.

To be fair, there are Arabs who would say we can chart an arc of Zionist exhaustion. Look at these guys, they don't want to defend their country anymore, Israeli's are leaving for Berlin, let's wait a little longer and it's over.

The conditions of peace

The conditions of peace are exactly the opposite of conventional wisdom especially in Europe. Conventional wisdom in Europe states there is no peace because Israel's too strong, Palestinians are too weak. To have peace you need to pressure Israel to be weaker, isolated, and help the Palestinians every way you can, recognise them as a state, then you can level the playing field. This is what the Swedish Foreign Minister said when they recognised Palestine: 'We seek to level the playing field.' But if my analysis of what drives the conflict is correct, what brings peace is exactly the opposite. What brings peace is Israeli power that makes it appear immovable and Arab Palestinian weakness that leads them to understand that they cannot follow delusions of a disappearance of the Jewish people from their region, or a sovereign Jewish people from their region.

So the conditions of peace thereby become conditions that emphasise how immovable Israel is and put the Arab world in a position of relative weakness that forces them to put those ideas aside and slowly leave them behind.

The conditions that will bring peace are being created as a result of the revolutions in the Arab world, their perception of an Iranian threat, the notion that Israel is relevant in many things.

I have complete faith in Israel and in my people that should such an opportunity truly arise, we will sign on the dotted line. Contrary to all the images about the settlements, hijacking land, there is one condition of the Jewish people that is the only thing that defines who we are: we are small. That's really what matters about who we are. We are small. We are not superior moral beings, we're not nicer people than anyone else, but the reason Israel repeatedly agreed to partition in 1947, and again in 1967 and 1968, and in 2000 and 2008, and Israel is willing to compromise is not because we're good people. We are small. We understand that whereas the Arabs can at least think of our annihilation as a possibility, we cannot annihilate 420million people or 1.2billion Muslims. We need to compromise, there is no way for us to survive. Zionism has made progress through compromise, through understanding that ultimately we take what we can get. So I have no doubt that if there is a real possibility of a sovereign Jewish acceptance into the region, Israel will do whatever it takes, the necessary compromise, leaving the territories in order to make it happen.

And the details in how we arrange our lives together - whether it is two sovereign states with an economic cooperation agreement, security cooperation, federation, confederation - those will become the details we will work out, once there is a profound acceptance that they are not trying to throw us away.

Jerusalem

On Jerusalem, in the Partition Resolution of 47, Jerusalem was to belong to no one. Not to the Arab state, not to the Jewish state, but to be an international protectorate. The map of Jerusalem in the partition plan is huge; it includes Bethlehem and it is not just the Old City. It is even bigger than Jerusalem today. That idea only existed on paper because the Arabs challenged partition violently, and lost the war, and Jerusalem became divided between the Western side of Jerusalem in which there was nothing holy, only home drawn neighbourhoods, and the Eastern part of Jerusalem that included the Old City and its immediate surroundings which was under the Jordanian occupation and totalled six square kilometres. When Israel captured the territory in 1967, it basically created a new municipal map for Jerusalem that annexed not only the six square kilometres of Jordanian Jerusalem but another 70 square kilometres, so ten times as much, of Arab villages around Jerusalem, and that became united Jerusalem.

I was born in 1970 after the Six Day War, and grew up in Jerusalem. It was always clear that the city was never united. We went once or twice to the Old City to buy baggy pants. Our parents were horrified that we went there, but we would never venture into the Arab villages that became part of the municipal city of Jerusalem. As a teenager in the '80s, Olmert became Jerusalem's

Mayor, following the legendary Teddy Kollek, and there was a joke running at the time, saying 'oh look Olmert is finally realising Teddy Kollek's vision of united Jerusalem, united East and West Jerusalem, because under his leadership the Western part of the city is now looking as neglected as the eastern side.' During the '80s and the '90s, Jerusalem became poorer and dirtier, increasingly being called 'periphery,' that needed money from the government, and all in order to keep up this idea that it is a unified city. I remember going to various pro-Israel conferences, hearing our politicians say, 'Jerusalem is ours, united forever' and I would think united where? Forever how? There was nothing that seemed to be beneficial about this idea, it only destroyed what was a thriving city.

Precisely because it is 50 years, I would like to puncture holes in what I think are obvious and accepted lies. I try to give legitimacy to alternative ideas where a lot of people agree on the lie, but a lot of people secretly don't agree. I wanted to try and give some backbone to Israeli politicians to stop using that phrase. Even Israeli politicians from the left feel that if they would say Jerusalem must be divided, the earth will somehow open up and they will disappear. So I just wanted to give legitimacy to the idea that Jerusalem has always been divided between the Arab city and the Hebrew city, and a lot of architects and city planners did work to show it remains divided despite all the building of Jewish neighbourhoods east of the green line. It can be re-divided, and the only thing that really remains, separating the Hebrew neighbourhoods from the Arab neighbourhoods, is the question of the future of the Old City, which for me is really about less symbolism and more functionalism. How do we ensure that everyone has access? Here I will say this. I am no fan of the idea that the Jews should be the only sovereign people in Jerusalem, but I will say this: The Jews are probably the best bet above the Christians and Muslims as custodians of Jerusalem, because we are small, we go back to that. Because we are small, we know we cannot afford to mess around with either of these groups who are 1-2 billion people. So the Jews are probably a good custodian of the holy sites because we don't dare mess around with civilisations what are far larger than our own, but that is a more practical argument not a theological argument to which I am not party.

Our responsibility

I will leave with the ancient Rabbinic saying, that we have a duty, and although we will not be the ones to finish the job, still have to do something. I do believe that the fact that this might take a century does not mean that we do nothing. We have a responsibility to promote a vision of peace that is based on the idea of mutual recognition and by demonstrating repeatedly that we are willing to divide the land for the sake of peace, but also being very clear that peace will be bought about as long as we are powerful and steadfast and insist that at least in part of the land we very much have the right as well as the might.

Professor Asher Susser

Egypt

The heady days of Nasserism, when Gamal Abdul Nasser was the President of Egypt, and leading Egypt and the Arabs to what seemed to be an Arab nationalist idea, was based on three principles; Arab unity, Arab socialism (government controlled economies) and an alliance with Soviet Union in the Cold war. It was in the eyes of Nasser and most of the Arabs, the formula for great Arab success. This was the formula that would transform the Arabs into not only a Middle Eastern power, but a world power. And of course this was the recipe for the defeat of Israel.

There were no greater supporters of Nasser than the Palestinians, because they truly believed that Nasser and Arab socialism would deliver Palestine.

It is true that before the war in 1967 the aura of Nasser was already losing its flair. He already had some failures, including the breakup of the union with Syria and the civil war in Yemen, but he was still a great, historic figure. Come the war in 1967, and in six days all of this was trashed. The Arabs in modern times have never suffered a more humiliating and disastrous defeat than the war in 1967. This created a watershed in Middle Eastern history; the whole idea of Arab nationalism – as a panacea for the ills of the Arabs - turned out to be an empty vessel. There was nothing in it. The defeat in 1967 was an indication not only of the defeat of Nasser's political philosophy, but more seriously, of the fact that the Arabs had failed to modernise successfully when Israel had.

Israel, in defeating the Arabs, became a monument to Arab inadequacy. This had two consequences; firstly, the recognition by the key Arab states that they cannot defeat Israel, and the beginning of the idea of coming to terms with Israel. Yet, at the same time, Israel is detested as a monument to Arab defeat and inadequacy, precisely because it is a reflection and daily reminder – to this very day – of Arab weakness. Arab peace making with Israel is therefore a mixed bag. It is reflective of an acceptance of the reality, but of no great love lost between the Israelis and the Arabs. And this remains true of countries Israel has made peace with, like Egypt and Jordan.

Syria

Syria was always more radical. The Syrians always believed themselves to be the beating heart of Arabism in Damascus. But the Syrians, as opposed to the Egyptians, were no match for Israel. If the Egyptians decide for whatever reason to withdraw from the conflict with Israel, the Syrians cannot fight Israel on their own. Therefore, the decision Egypt makes on war or peace decides for the other Arab countries no matter what they prefer. Without Egypt, the Arabs have no war option. Egypt fought its last war with Israel in 1973, the Yom Kippur war, which was not a war to destroy Israel but to pave the way for a negotiation. Israel has not fought a war with any Arab state for 44 years, the reason being that Egypt withdrew from the conflict.

Israel has troubles with the Palestinians, but they are not a military match for Israel. It is a problem and it continues to fester, but Israel does not face the existential threat of a great war that they always feared before 1967.

Jordan

Key to Jordan's role in the conflict is its geopolitical centrality, sitting at the heart of the Palestinian

question. After 1948 Jordan controlled the West Bank and annexed it. The term 'West Bank' is a Jordanian invention; they called it this from 1950 onwards so as not to call it 'Palestine.' It is therefore an anti-Palestinian term designed to eliminate the word Palestine from the atlas. After 1948 there was no Palestine. For the Jordanians, the goal was to Jordanise the Palestinians.

The loss of the West Bank in 1967 was dramatic and had far reaching consequences not only for Jordan but for Israel. The Israeli occupation of the West Bank arrested the process of Jordanisation of the Palestinians. Having lost the West Bank, the Jordanians lost their manipulative power to continue to control the destiny of the Palestinians, and from 1967 onwards the Palestinians became a much more independent and autonomous player. The Israelis now became the occupation against which the Palestinians reorganised and defined themselves anew as Palestinians. By kicking out the Jordanians from the West Bank, it ushered in the re-Palestinianisation of the Arab-Israeli conflict. From 1948-67, the Palestinians were hardly a player at all. After 1948 Israel signed a series of armistice agreements with the Arab states, they didn't even talk to the Palestinians. After 1967 that changed, and eventually Israel had no choice not only to negotiate with the Palestinians, but with the PLO, which Israel said it never would.

Egypt and the Palestinians vs. Jordan and the Palestinians

Egypt had a totally different attitude to Jordan. They didn't annex Gaza, and the Palestinians in Gaza never became Egyptian citizens. Jordan annexed the West Bank, and all the West Bank Palestinians became citizens of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. The Egyptians had no interest in Egyptianising the Palestinians, and the Egyptian policy in Gaza was contrary to the Jordanian policy in the West Bank and often used to torpedo Jordanian policy. Egypt encouraged the establishment of the PLO and the rejuvenation of the Palestinian political entity. Gaza was used as finger in Jordan's eye by the Egyptians; to promote Palestinian-ness and to continue to maintain the independent identity of Palestine.

Here the Jordanians and the Israelis had identical interests. They are the only two countries in the Middle East that gave the Palestinians citizenship; neither wanted the preservation of the independent Palestinian identity.

The war of 1967 actually reversed the process of Jordanisation, which the Israelis saw as a major interest of their own. Therefore some of the results of the 1967 war have in the long run been somewhat self-defeating for Israel.

We are still learning the lessons of 1967. We live with the consequences of 1967, that change as we move along, and in many respects it has changed the Middle East and the place of Israel and the Palestinians in the region. It created a reality that the Israelis were not in favour of but had to come to terms with – independent Palestinianness. This has changed the nature of the conflict. The Arab-Israeli conflict is over, what we have now is the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Palestinian-ness in Israel

Saying the Palestinians were all together after the Six Day War is only partially true as there is still the diaspora. But after the Six Day War, for the first time since 1948 Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza and Israel communicated freely with each other. This was a major catalyst for the revival of Palestinian identity; not only in the West Bank and Gaza, but amongst Israel's Palestinians. The Palestinianisation of the Israeli Arabs – a term the Arabs in Israel don't like at all – is a political attitude which didn't exist before 1967, and which became far more accelerated and is expressed with increasing fervour. As a result, the tensions in Israel between the Jewish majority and the Palestinian minority are not declining. Israel doesn't only have to come to terms with the idea of Palestinianness in the West Bank and Gaza, but Palestinianness in Israel. Israel is the nation-state of the Jewish people and it seeks to remain so. Israelis may differ and argue about Israel's borders, but very few Israeli Jews think that Israel should cease to be the state of the Jewish people.

20 per cent of the people in Israel are not Jewish, so how do they relate to Israel? Through its symbols? Do you really expect Palestinians to play football for Israel? The flag is typically Jewish. These issues didn't exist before 1967.

The Six Day War and Political Islam

There is definitely a connection, but I would not argue that the Six Day War created political Islam and that political Islam is Israel's fault. The Six Day War didn't create the emptiness of Nasser's brand of Arab nationalism and the inherent weaknesses of Arab society, but it exposed them.

And the Islamists after the war in 1967 could say with a great measure of conviction: 'we told you so, all of this Arab nationalism is bunk.' After all, what is Arab nationalism? It's a secular idea, a novelty. It is taken from 19th Century European nationalism where people were defined by the language they spoke, and the linkage in many places in Europe between language, territory and nationhood. The Arabs took a leaf out of this European book of nationalism, and began to argue that the speakers of the Arabic language were a nation. What that meant, however, was that for the first time since the advent of Islam people were no longer defined by their religious beliefs. In the Middle East, people were never defined by the language they spoke or the territory they inhabited. In the Ottoman Empire and the preceding Muslim empires people were defined by their religion. The notion that people should define themselves by their language is secular – putting potentially Christian, Muslim and Jewish speakers of Arabic in the same national entity. For Islamists, Arab nationalism is an aircraft carrier of secularism. And therefore, when the Six Day War ended the way it did, the Islamists could now argue, we told you so – Secularism is not the solution, Islam is the solution.' They could say so with a great measure of popular support.

After 1967, their message was far more understandable and acceptable and secular nationalism was dealt a serious setback from which it has never fully recovered. If we look at Palestinian-ness, it has evolved, but what is Hamas? Hamas is not against Palestinian-ness, but it is for the Islamisation of Palestine rather than the secular Palestinian national movement which is for the Palestinianisation of Islam. Where will Palestinian-ness be in two generations? I have no idea. Collective identity is not given, it changes over time. Secular nationalism – whether Palestinian, Algerian or Turkish – is on the back foot.

UN Resolution 242

We should recognise that resolution 242 is very favourable from Israel's point of view. It took a long time to realise this, and many Israelis won't agree now.

Resolution 242 does not require Israel to withdraw forthwith from the territories occupied; it says Israel should withdraw in exchange for peace and recognition. It is not unconditional. I am not a great fan of the occupation, but it is not illegal. Resolution 242 does not require Israel to withdraw except for peace. If peace is not in the offing Israel does not have to withdraw.

The international community since 1967 – and this has only increased – recognise Israel within the 1967 boundaries (that is Israel in 78 per cent of historic Palestine) as the nation-state of the Jewish people more than it ever did before 1967. In the 1950s the UK and the US put huge pressure on Israel to give up parts of the Negev to Nasser and Israel's borders were not recognised by the international community pre-1967. But while there are demands that Israel withdraw to the 1967 boundaries, Israel within the 1967 boundaries is fully recognised. There is no challenge to Israel in the 1967 boundaries or as the nation-state of the Jewish people.

Former US Secretary of State John Kerry's speech after the UN Resolution 2334 in December 2016 talks about the solution to the refugee problem: there should be a solution that does not affect the status of Israel as the nation state of the Jewish people, i.e. they mustn't return to Israel. That is Israel's position.

Israel has had two great wars – in 1948 and 1967 – which have each created political issues that have to be resolved. With the Palestinians there are two files of issues: the 1948 file relates to Israel's existence, the refugees and the status of the Palestinian minority in Israel rather than the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza. The 1967 file includes Jerusalem, borders and settlements and here the international community is united against the Israeli position. On the 1948 issues the international community is with Israel.

The international community have not bought into the Right of Return. This reinforces that Israel of 1948 is fully accepted as a legitimate member of the family of nations. This is a great achievement – that the international community doesn't question at all Israel's possession of 78 per cent of historical Palestine, leaving the Palestinians with 22 per cent – we're a lot better off than we were before.

The resolution of 1967 was favourable to Israel because the war of 1967 was seen as a war of self-defence; it was not understood as a war of aggression. Israel was under pressure and surrounded by the Arabs, there were threats to attack and destroy Israel, and the Israelis rose up, mobilised, and fought back and won a phenomenal victory. Zionism as a project of historical self-defence of the Jewish people against their horrific fate enjoys very widespread international legitimacy. Along with Zionism as self-defence, comes the Israeli acceptance of the partition of Palestine, two states. Israel has enjoyed the legitimacy of the international community because of Israel's acceptance of two states. You can read the Balfour Declaration, you can read the partition plan of 1937 and of 1947; never has the international community recognised all of Palestine as belonging to the Jews. The Balfour Declaration speaks of a Jewish national home in Palestine, not the transformation of Palestine into a Jewish national home.

Post 1967, Israel has taken a position that is somewhat less about self-defence. There are those – the supporters of the settler movement – who essentially speak not of self-defence but of religious revivalism and rejection of partition. This I would argue is seriously undermining Israel's legitimacy, because Israel's legitimacy is founded on Zionism as self-defence and the acceptance of partition.

The settler movement

The very beginning of the settler movement was forced upon the Israeli government by people on the religious political right. First of all it was those from the Etzion bloc that fell in 1948 who demanded to go back immediately after the war. This was legitimate and therefore the government agreed, however this was not an initiative by the government.

Then there was the establishment of the Jewish community in Hebron by Rabbi Levinger, who went to the city in Passover 1968, received permission from the government to have the Seder [Passover dinner] there, and when it was over refused to leave.

The settler initiative was in large parts, and in the last 20 years mostly, settlements established without decisions by the Israeli government. The settlement movement represents a significant erosion of the authority of the Government. But then there are also the settlements established by the Labour Party, the idea that Yigal Allon had of settlements in the Jordan valley (the Allon plan), and there were settlements established by the government and with government blessing. But since the rise of the Likud to power and from Menachem Begin onwards, there has been both government approved settlements but also, to a large extent from Oslo onwards, none established by government decision. The government is now talking about establishing a new settlement for the people that were evicted from Amona – that will be the first government decision to establish a settlement since 1991.

Largely, the settlement enterprise has been thrust upon the Israeli public by a very effective settler movement. This was a militant minority imposing its ideas and views on the majority of Israelis.

Jerusalem

The heart of biblical Israel is the West Bank, not the coastal plain where most Jews live. The occupation of the West Bank and the unification of Jerusalem after the 1967 war, including the possession of the Kotel and the capture of the Jewish quarter, was a huge encouragement for militant religious revivalism. Without the West Bank it would not have been possible, and this encouraged the Rabbis to go in this direction. It became an opportunity. Before 1967, we never used to talk about it. I don't remember one discussion in High School on Jerusalem complaining that we didn't have access to the Kotel or the Jewish quarter. It was a non-issue, and we accepted the reality for what it was.

In the latter part of the war in 1948, Israel could have taken all of the West Bank and Jerusalem; it was there to be taken, but they never did. They didn't even take the Kotel and the Jewish quarter. The fight for Jerusalem in 1948 was one of the hardest fought of all; not because of Jerusalem's holiness, but because there were 100,000 Jews there, and Ben-Gurion and the Israeli leadership were convinced that if Jerusalem fell to the Arabs, Israel would not be able to face the music. It would have been such a disaster if Israel would have lost the war. The fight for Jerusalem had nothing to do with the holy sites, and when the war was over even though Israel could have taken the holy sites, it never did. The Kotel and the Jewish quarter were left in control of the Jordanians.

The partition resolution of 1947 said that Jerusalem is not part of the Jewish or Arab state; it is a separate entity to be governed by the UN. Ben Gurion wisely decided not to take it all because he said the whole world would gang up against Israel and call for the internationalisation of the city as endorsed by the UN resolution. If Israel split it with the Jordanians, the international community will live with it. Israel and Jordan surreptitiously had a common interest in leaving things as they were in Jerusalem.

Dr Itzhack Ifat



My experience in the Six Day War

I was born in Tel Aviv in 1943. I lived at home with my mum and sister, with no father. I grew up in the boy scouts in Tel Aviv. When I was 18, I did military service with my friends in a paratrooper unit. I finished my army service in the '60s and went to university to study medicine.

The lead up to the Six Day War was difficult for Israel. Everyone was called up to the army; you couldn't see men in the street.

The paratroopers however were not called up. We asked the regiment 'why are we still at home?' and they said 'look guys, as you are still at home, it means the war has not begun.'

One day, after I went to see my girlfriend at the university, I closed my front door and one minute later I heard the doorbell ring. Outside was my recruitment order, and I was so, so glad. Finally they saved me from isolation.

I packed my backpack with underwear and socks and I went to the gathering point.

At the gathering point I met with friends and the commander gave instructions. 'Because Abu Nasser (the Egyptian president) closed the Straits of Tiran, we are going to capture El Arish.' From the gathering point, we went to a kibbutz near Tel Nof Military Airport and from there we made our way to El Arish.

Everybody took their parachutes and straps, and we were extremely motivated. Finally, after so many years, to make a parachute jump behind enemy lines is a dream of every fighter, so we were very happy.

On our journey to El Arish, King Hussein started to bomb Jerusalem and there were some casualties. We saw our Commander, Yossi, go here and there and here and there, and we said 'Yossi what happened?' 'Look my friends, we have to cancel the parachute jump in El Arish because Hussein started to bomb Jerusalem. We have to go to Jerusalem.' Almost with tears in our eyes we drove away and we got on the bus to Jerusalem. The bus driver saw that we were sad and wanted to cheer us up so he put the radio on Egyptian radio and we heard Nasser boasting about downing Israeli aircraft and we knew it was not true. It made us laugh.

With no preparation, we arrived at the Beit HaKerem neighbourhood in Jerusalem at 12am. So many women and girls came out of their houses with coffee and cakes. It was very touching to see. Whilst we were in Beit Hakerem, I kept on having tooth ache and one of the women who we sat near her house said 'my husband is a dentist, if anyone needs please come in'. I jumped. as if bitten by a snake, at this opportunity, and he gave me a local anaesthetic.

We made our way to Ammunition Hill and on the way, there were some fences with barbed wire we needed to bomb, roughly 300-400 metres away from Ammunition Hill. We entered Ammunition Hill through very shallow trenches. The Jordanians were shooting us, and it was like hell.

The war was close combat on Ammunition Hill. We advanced in the trenches and I saw my friend get a bullet in his buttocks. I saw he was going to get another one but I was faster than they were and I shot the attacker dead.

I advanced like my friends but finished my bullets in my magazine and I wanted to reload. As I started to reload my magazine, one Arab soldier saw me without a rifle and jumped on me with a bayonet attached to his rifle. I have a scar from this. I gave him a kick between his legs and then managed to shoot him.

At around 2 o'clock we finished our mission on Ammunition Hill. We had many casualties, between 36 and 46. Unfortunately, one of my best friends was hit in the chest by a bazooka shell and died.

After Ammunition Hill, we made our way to Har Hatzofim. We went through the Lion's Gate into the Old City of Jerusalem to the Temple Mount and down to the Kotel. We opened a very small gate on the south side and walked down the stairs to the square in front of the Western Wall. At the time, there were many Arab houses there, around three metres away from the Western Wall which were subsequently destroyed.

We saw the kotel, which was very exciting and emotional. After 2,000 years of not being able to go to the kotel, believe me it was exciting. We put notes in between the stones and my friend stepped on the fence and raised the flag.

Whilst we were there, the head of the soldiers screamed 'paramedic, paramedic come here.' We thought one of our friends was wounded. Yigal Arad, the paramedic, ran to the place where the voice came from and he saw a pregnant woman kneeling with pain and wanted to help her. He was only a paramedic and not a doctor so he called up a doctor who ran to the woman and patiently helped her give birth to a baby girl.

We finished the war in Jerusalem and began to make our way to the Syrian border, to Tel Afahur. On our way to Syria we found out the United Nations had stopped the war and there was a ceasefire.

We then went back to Ammunition Hill and our commander, Yossi, asked every soldier to help erect a monument from stones in memory of those that had fallen on Ammunition Hill.

We then went to the other side of Ammunition Hill and erected one more monument for the Jordanian legionnaires who fought very well, like good soldiers. I don't know who removed this monument, but I want you to know the Israelis made the monument for their enemy.

Jerusalem

We were very glad to reunify Jerusalem after 2000 years. The whole of Israel was celebrating.

I hope that Jerusalem will not be divided anymore and remains in Israeli hands. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel.

The famous photo

When we were by the Kotel we saw a photographer (who unfortunately died two months ago). He passed us and lay down on the ground and told us 'stop, stop' and we stopped and he took a photo.

He did a Pazasta [an acronym outlining the army manoeuvre when coming into contact with the enemy; as soon as you get fired upon, you fall, crawl, hide and shoot back]. The photographer fell and he shot with the camera.

Behind me is a boy from Nahariyah; one of the comrades, one of the friends.

My friends, either side of me, are still great friends and are in contact. We met up with each other two weeks ago.

I have developed a little belly! The others stayed good looking, but not as good looking as me, though they are lovely men nonetheless.

After the war

I married my girlfriend and became a gynaecologist, studying at the Technion in Haifa.

We have three daughters and nine grandchildren.

I retired two months ago.





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