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**MASTER OF DEFENCE STUDIES**

*Six Days in June – Pre-Emptive Self-Defence or Aggression?*

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## ABSTRACT

*The Six-Day War, launched on June 5, 1967 by Israel against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan was one of the most decisive and one-sided military campaigns in history. Much has been written on the subject of the Six-Day war: its causes, its aftermath, and the continuing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The roots of the conflict can be traced back for centuries, but the central issue was the inability of these two groups to reach common ground due to the duelling narratives of their collective history. Whether or not a state can legally and justifiably attack another state pre-emptively is based upon whether the state under threat can prove the threat is imminent and would result in catastrophic damage to the state, and that all other means of avoiding conflict have been exhausted. This paper examines the causes of the Six-Day War from both the Arab and Israeli perspectives, then analyzes whether the attack was a justified pre-emptive attack, using the Just War Theory framework and the law of Armed Conflict. Robert Jervis's spiral model is used to describe how misunderstanding between states, coupled with a fear of military defeat, can lead to pre-emptive attack. Using this model, the paper proves that Israel faced the imminent threat of a devastating attack from the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan in June 1967. Using the information available to Israel at the time, the paper further demonstrates that Israel's surprise attack on its neighbours was a justified pre-emptive one, both in accordance with Just War Theory and international law.*

## INTRODUCTION

The Six-Day War, launched on June 5, 1967 by Israel against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, was one of the most lopsided military campaigns in history. A great deal has been written on the subject of the Six-Day war: its causes, its aftermath, and the continuing conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbours. The roots of the conflict can be traced back for centuries, but the central theme is the inability of these two groups to reach common ground due to the duelling narratives of their collective history. This is a story of two religions, one land, and two vastly different interpretations of who belongs there. This inability (or refusal) of both parties to understand each other's viewpoint can explain why a true and lasting peace eludes the Middle East to this day.

Israel conducted a devastating air attack on June 5, resulting in the near-total destruction of Egypt's, Syria's, and Jordan's air forces. Israel claimed it had launched the attack based on the belief that it faced an existential threat from the combined armies of its three neighbours. Under Article 51 of the United Nations (UN) Charter, a state may use armed force in self-defence.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, if a state believes that it faces an imminent threat of a devastating attack from another state, it may attack pre-emptively to reduce or eliminate the threat. Whether or not a state can justifiably and legally attack another state pre-emptively is based upon whether the state under threat can prove the threat is imminent would result in catastrophic damage to the state, and that all other avenues to avoid conflict have been exhausted. The state must also ensure any pre-emptive attack is likely to succeed and that it is proportional to the threat presented.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml>

This paper will prove that based on the information available in 1967, Israel faced an imminent threat of attack from the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and therefore conducted a justified pre-emptive attack. The paper will consist of four chapters: *Just War Theory, the Israeli Perspective, the Arab Perspective, and Was the Six-Day War Pre-Emptive and Justified*. The first chapter of this paper will first examine Just War Theory (JWT), specifically *Jus Ad Bellum* (justice of going to war) and the concept of pre-emptive war within international law, and then will analyze two well-known conflict theories from which to choose the best model for the paper's analysis.

Just War Theory is a philosophical and religious doctrine, influenced by international law and attempts to guide the justified use of force by states. It consists of *Jus Ad Bellum*, *Jus in Bello*, and *Jus Post Bellum*, or the justice of going to war, the justice of force in war, and the securing of justice sought by resorting to war. The Just War concept goes back centuries, discussed by the Roman philosopher Cicero, St Thomas Aquinas, and continues to be in use today. Many of the authors and sources for this paper frame their research and publications in Just War Theory, and Article 51 of the United Nations charter and its acceptance of state self defence as a reason for war is rooted in Just War Theory. This paper will focus specifically on *Jus Ad Bellum* and the claim of self-defence as a justification for a state to wage war on another state.

Robert Jervis has developed several theories on how states end up in conflict. One is the offense-defense balance, which states that wars are more likely when one state has a perceived advantage over another – their offense is stronger than the others' defense. Duelling narratives and associated misunderstanding are the key tenets of Jervis's Spiral Model, a theory of conflict based upon uncertainty. The model describes

how one state can end up in conflict by misunderstanding statements or actions by another state, which results in counter-actions or statements which are in turn misconstrued, leading to conflict that could have been avoided through dialogue. Both of these theories and the associated concept of deterrence will be examined in detail.

Whether or not a state faces an imminent threat is based upon the other party's stated intentions and its ability to follow through on the threat. For example, if one state had continuously called for the destruction of another state, and then massed its troops along the border, the first state could certainly perceive both actions to constitute an imminent threat. However, if an aggressive state called for the destruction of another and had no ability to carry out the threat (i.e. it deployed no troops, or deployed a negligible force), the threat could not be seen as imminent. A contemporary example of this would be Iran's repeated calls for the elimination or destruction of Israel with no associated troop deployment.

Chapter two of the paper will analyze the build-up to the Six-Day War from the Israeli perspective, including its relations with its Arab neighbours, its alliance with the United States (US), and its diplomatic interactions with the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR) in the days leading up to the conflict. This chapter will discuss whether the diplomatic and military environment in the Middle East in the first few months of 1967 made war inevitable from the Israeli view or whether Israel misread the actions of its neighbours. Raids into Israel by organizations branded as terrorists by Israel and supported by Syria; mutual defense pacts between Egypt, Syria, and Jordan; the removal of UN peacekeepers from the Sinai at Egypt's request and resultant Egyptian troop movements; and finally the closure of the Straits of Tiran by Egypt could all be seen as

provocative and threatening. Seeming indifference from the US and veiled threats for the USSR also weighed heavily on Israel. It will also analyze Israeli actions and reactions

Chapter three of the paper will analyze the same situation from the perspective of the Arab states. Syria believed that Israel was given preferential treatment on the world stage. Repeated attacks by Israel against Syria were ignored by the UN; therefore Syria decided to meet Israeli military force with its own military force. It also supported the Palestinian group Al Fatah in their raids against Israel. Jordan was a small kingdom with a small military, and was not belligerent towards Israel like Syria and Egypt were. Nevertheless, an Israeli raid into a Jordanian village resulted in Jordan signing a mutual defense pact with Egypt. From the Jordanian perspective it was Israel's actions that contributed to the outbreak of hostilities, not Arab ones. The actions and words of President Nasser of Egypt, the key player in the scenario, will be discussed. The paper will analyze whether his words and actions were threats, or merely bluster, used to strengthen his position in the Arab world. Finally the actions and inaction of the two superpowers will be examined, demonstrating that they had opportunities to stop hostilities before they started, but did not or could not due to their own situations or designs for the Middle East.

The fourth and final chapter of the paper will use the definition of pre-emptive war from chapter one and the evidence presented in chapters two and three in order to determine that Israel's attack on June 5, 1967 was in fact pre-emptive rather than preventive. Using the framework of JWT and the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), further analysis of the evidence will show that the attack was justified under international law.



## CHAPTER ONE: JUST WAR THEORY

This chapter of the paper will define and analyze the key principles in determining whether the Six-Day War was pre-emptive and justified in accordance with Just War Theory (JWT). First, the concepts of *Jus Ad Bellum* and pre-emptive war will be defined and analyzed. Two leading theories in the study of why wars happen, the offense-defense balance and the spiral model, will be defined and analyzed along with the deterrence factor that is linked with the spiral model. Once both theories have been defined and analyzed, one theory will be chosen as the framework for studying the Six-Day War.

### *Jus Ad Bellum*

Prior to determining whether Israel's offensive in the Six-Day War was either justified and/or pre-emptive, the concepts of justified and pre-emptive war must be defined and discussed. *Jus Ad Bellum*, or the justice of going to war, is the principle guiding the moral right of a state to wage war. For a state to declare *Jus Ad Bellum*, several conditions must be met:

- (a) the cause is just (to everyone, not just the state declaring war);
- (b) the justice of the cause is sufficiently great as to warrant warfare and does not negate countervailing values of equal or greater weight;
- (c) on the basis of available knowledge and reasonable assessment of the situation, one must be as confident as one reasonable can be of achieving one's just objective without yielding longer-term consequences that are worse than the status quo;

- (d) warfare is genuinely a last resort: all peaceful alternatives which may also secure justice to a reasonable and sufficient degree have been exhausted;
- (e) one's own moral standing is not decisively compromised with respect to the waging of war in this instance;
- (f) even if the cause is just, the resort to war is actually motivated by that cause and not some other (hidden) reason;
- (g) one is a legitimate, duly constituted authority with respect to the waging of war: one has the *right* to wage it; and
- (h) one must publicly declare war and publicly defend that declaration on the basis of (a) – (g), and subsequently be prepared to be politically accountable for the conduct and aftermath of the war, based on the criteria of *Jus In Bello* [Justice In War] and *Jus Post Bellum* [Justice After War].<sup>2</sup>

The use of force by states is governed through the use of treaties and customary international law. Article 2(4) of the United Nations (UN) Charter stated:

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations<sup>3</sup>

There are two exceptions to the prohibition of the use of force by states in the UN Charter. Article 51 allows for states to use force in self-defence, and allows the UN Security Council (UNSC) to authorize the use of force to protect or restore international peace and security:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security. Measures taken by Members in the exercise of this right of self-defence

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Evans, ed. *Just War Theory: A Reappraisal*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 12.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter1.shtml>

shall be immediately reported to the Security Council and shall not in any way affect the authority and responsibility of the Security Council under the present Charter to take at any time such action as it deems necessary in order to maintain or restore international peace and security.<sup>4</sup>

Other international treaties governing the use of force by states include the 1928 General Treaty for the Renunciation of War (also referred to as the Kellogg-Briand Pact), and the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law Concerning Friendly Relations.<sup>5</sup>

Customary international law (that is, informal, unwritten international law that is generally accepted by states and derived by state practice, even if not covered by a treaty) and natural law (law inherent in human nature and human rationale) strengthens *Jus Ad Bellum* and all of JWT. *Jus Ad Bellum* also has ties to theology and philosophy, as David Armstrong stated in his book *International Law and International Relations*:

Traditionally, distinction is drawn in customary international law between *jus ad bellum* (law on recourse to war) and *jus in bello* (law on the conduct of war). Natural law on both originates in the ‘just war’ tradition. This tradition, which combined Christian theology, secular moral philosophy, and medieval military and diplomatic practice, provides the resources for practical ethical reasoning about the legitimacy of using force. These philosophical resources centre on an evolving set of criteria for when and how force may be used justly.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/chapter7.shtml>

<sup>5</sup> David Armstrong, Theo Farrel, and Helene Lambert. *International Law and International Relations*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 118-119. The Kellogg-Briand Pact remains applicable with 63 signatories. The 1970 Declaration is non-binding, therefore has no basis in International Law.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 119. Armstrong discusses the origins of JWT back to the Roman Empire. The Roman Empire could only wage war once their enemies failed to meet their demands, and only once a college of priests had determined there were sufficient grounds to wage war. I would argue this was more a check and balance of aggression than JWT, but it does cover the origins. St Augustine argued that war could be justified to protect the faithful, and St Aquinas further refined the definition to include righting wrongs. Aquinas also introduced the concepts of lawful authority and intent, premises that form the basis of JWT today. Armstrong devotes an entire chapter to the origins of *jus ad bellum*. Contemporary JWT scholars include Michael Walzer and Michael Byers. See also Michael Byers. *War Law: Understanding International Law and Armed Conflict*, (London: Atlantic Books, 2005), 3-4.

The JWT conditions listed above can be grouped into four distinct categories – 1) just cause; 2) establishing the conditions are serious enough to consider war; 3) considering the ethical character of those advocating war; and 4) confirming the authority of those considering war.<sup>7</sup> Establishing just cause in war is related to defence of one's own state or the defence of others. Defence of one's own state is straightforward; if a state is under attack, has been attacked, or feels it is about to be attacked, it has a just cause for going to war (i.e. self defence).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, defence of others can be used as a reason for going to war, if the state being attacked is an ally, if genocide is taking place, or if a state is considered to be in chaos.<sup>9</sup> The defence of others is the cornerstone of Article 51 from the charter – the authority granted the UNSC to use force for the protection or restoration of peace and security. Establishing that conditions are serious enough to warrant war usually invokes the reasoning of last resort. Reasonable alternatives should be considered, however that assumes that both parties in an impending conflict have the same definition of reasonable.<sup>10</sup> When considering the ethical character of those advocating war, intentions and motivations must be examined. However, examining intention and motivation is difficult and thus challenging for JWT thinking. For example, self defence could be either the motivation, or it could be aggression, depending on the public position as well as private reasoning or documentation. The First World War grew out of a single act that spiralled into

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<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>8</sup> Nick Fotion. *War and Ethics: A New Just War Theory*. (London: Continuum, 2007), 13.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

<sup>10</sup> Evans, 16 and Fotion, 14.

numerous states fighting due to their alliances – with both sides claiming self defence. However, the start of the First World War could hardly be considered justified by either side. Self-defence requires to principles of customary law relating to the use of force, the principles of necessity and proportionality.<sup>11</sup> Necessity implies that the state has exhausted all other means of solving a dispute or crisis; in the case of the First World War, the assassination of the Archduke Ferdinand was seen as the flashpoint. Yet it is very difficult to argue that the resulting four-year conflict was necessary for self-defence; rather, the conflict was a clash of empires waiting for an excuse. JWT requires exhausting all means prior to conflict – this was not the case in the First World War. In summary, a state having a reason for going to war is insufficient; it must also have the right intentions.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, those advocating or declaring war must have the proper legal authority to do so. Assuming that only states can go to war the lawful head of that state must make the reasons for going to war clear to the public and the enemy.<sup>13</sup>

*Jus Ad Bellum* and Just War Theory more broadly are theoretical models for examining legality and ethics in warfare. They define the moral and ethical guidelines for war to be considered necessary or justified by a state. The concept of pre-emptive war is directly related to *Jus Ad Bellum*, and the next section will examine this concept in detail.

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<sup>11</sup> Armstrong, 122.

<sup>12</sup> Evans, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

## Pre-Emptive War

Pre-emptive war is one in which one side attacks to forestall what it sees as an imminent attack on itself.<sup>14</sup> Pre-emptive war is different from preventive war in terms of immediacy. Preventive war is used when a state feels it could be under threat from another state in a few years, therefore it uses its superior power to attack while it has a military advantage. States tend to compare their future security with the status quo, and are tempted to act if their present security status is threatened. When a state feels that inaction will result in future loss or threat, they will act.<sup>15</sup> Israel's attack on Iraq's Osiraq nuclear reactor in 1981 demonstrates a preventive attack. Iraq did not possess nuclear weapons, and did not present an imminent military threat to Israel. Israel used the circumstantial evidence of Iraq's nuclear fuel purchase (the type of fuel that could be used for nuclear weapons) plus the belligerent tone of Saddam Hussein toward Israel to build a case for a preventive strike. Israel's vulnerability to a first strike by nuclear weapons was their final reason for launching a preventive attack.<sup>16</sup> The argument against preventive war is that it provides any aggressive state the justification to launch an attack, under the pretext of eliminating a future threat. Preventive strikes can also backfire, providing the target state the resolve to continue its military build-up.<sup>17</sup> Finally, preventive war relies on proper intelligence and an ability to correctly predict the future.

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<sup>14</sup> Dan Reiter. "Exploding the Powder Keg Myth: Preemptive Wars almost Never Happen." *International Security* 20, no. 2 (Autumn, 1995), 5.

<sup>15</sup> Howard M. Hensel. *The Legitimate use of Military Force: The Just War Tradition and the Customary Law of Armed Conflict*. (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 103.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

Changes in government or circumstances can eliminate a perceived threat, making the preventive attack unwarranted. The very behaviour targeted in a preventive attack may be elicited by the attack itself.

Pre-emptive war is used by a state when it fears an attack in the near term and will likely suffer defeat, therefore it is a short-term strategy motivated by fear.<sup>18</sup> It is also likely if a state feels its military or political situation is liable to get worse:

A country is especially likely to strike if it feels that, although it can win a war immediately, the chances of a favourable diplomatic settlement are slight and the military situation is likely to deteriorate. Furthermore, these estimates, which are logically independent, may be psychologically linked. Pessimism about current diplomatic and long-run military prospects may lead statesmen to exaggerate the possibility of current military victory as a way of convincing themselves that there is, in fact, a solution to what otherwise would be an intolerable dilemma.<sup>19</sup>

Under the Law of Armed Conflict (LOAC), and Just War Theory, pre-emptive war is justified, while preventive war is illegal under international law. The important factor in pre-emptive war is the timeline, the immediacy or inevitability and potential consequences of the threat. If by attacking pre-emptively a state can reduce or eliminate the potential harm of an armed attack by another state, it is justified in claim pre-emptive self-defense. Conversely, preventive war cannot be justified as there is no immediate threat of attack. By conducting a preventive attack, a state is assuming a worst-case scenario, and their actions could easily be perceived as aggression rather than self-defense.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Reiter, 6.

<sup>19</sup> Robert Jervis. "War and Misperception." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 18, no. 4, The Origin and Prevention of Major Wars (Spring, 1988), 676.

The line between pre-emptive and preventive self-defence became blurry with the advent of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD). WMD raises the bar significantly when determining an imminent threat. President George W. Bush argued that the US could not wait for terrorist organizations to attack using WMD; the US needed to act pre-emptively (or rather, preventively) to defend itself. As US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice famously responded to Iraq's alleged pursuit of WMD:

The problem here is that there will always be some uncertainty about how quickly Saddam can acquire nuclear weapons. But we don't want the smoking gun to be a mushroom cloud.<sup>21</sup>

President Bush used the concept of immanent – as in always present - vice imminent threat to justify preventive self-defence.<sup>22</sup> During the Cold War both sides had equal numbers of nuclear weapons and thus had deterrence. Under the new threat of non-state actors, the deterrence does not exist as the non-state actors have no state to retaliate against. Evans argued that this is not sufficient to legitimize the use of preventive war. He said “preventive war doctrines can lead to limitless war-making under the ever-expanding logic of prevention.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, if the threat is everywhere, then the state will forever be at war eliminating potential future threats. This argument is contrary to both LOAC and JWT. In an address to the United Nations General Assembly, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan said:

Now, some say this understanding is no longer tenable, since an armed attack with weapons of mass destruction could be launched at any time,

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<sup>20</sup> Walzer, Michael. *Just and Unjust Wars: A Moral Argument with Historical Illustrations* (BasicBooks, 1977), 80. Walzer argued that states may use force in the face of the threat of war.

<sup>21</sup> Interview of Condoleezza Rice by Wolf Blitzer of CNN, September 8, 2002.

<sup>22</sup> Evans, 40.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



without warning, or by a clandestine group. Rather than wait for that to happen, they argue, states have the right and obligation to use force pre-emptively, even on the territory of other states, and even while weapons systems that might be used to attack them are still being developed. According to this argument, states are not obliged to wait until there is agreement in the Security Council. Instead, they reserve the right to act unilaterally, or in ad hoc coalitions. This logic represents a fundamental challenge to the principles on which, however imperfectly, world peace and stability have rested for the last fifty-eight years. My concern is that, if it were to be adopted, it could set precedents that resulted in a proliferation of the unilateral and lawless use of force, with or without justification.<sup>24</sup>

Annan argues that a policy of pre-emption undermines the premise of war as a last resort and eliminates all non-military means of solving problems. While Annan uses the term pre-emption, his statement is actually describing preventive war. In the WMD age, states are arguing the threat is always imminent given the nature of WMD. Annan is saying that a policy of preventive war disguised as pre-emptive war violates international law regarding the use of force.<sup>25</sup>

An historical example of the difference of opinion between states about what constitutes a pre-emptive and a preventive strike is the *Caroline* incident where, in 1837, British forces boarded the American steamer *Caroline* in American waters after they heard it was ferrying arms, supplies, and men to anti-British forces in Canada. The vessel was boarded, its crew attacked, and the vessel set on fire. It was sent adrift towards Niagara Falls, where it broke apart and sank. The British claimed pre-emptive self-defense, however Daniel Webster, the US Secretary of State, rejected the British claim, arguing there needed to be an imminent threat to claim self-defense, and that all other

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<sup>24</sup> Given before the General Assembly September 23, 2003.

<sup>25</sup> Evans, 40.

needs must first be exhausted.<sup>26</sup> Ironically, US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice incorrectly used Webster as a *proponent* of anticipatory self-defense when discussing the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, when in fact he had done just the opposite.<sup>27</sup> This instance is merely used to illustrate how different states interpret their actions and their definitions of self-defence; it is not an example of existing international law pertaining to the use of force. Article 51 of the UN Charter remains the defining authority of the right of states to act in self-defence.

How, then, does a state determine whether a threat is imminent in order to justify a pre-emptive attack? Crawford argues that answering yes to the following two questions would imply aggressive intent, which, coupled with a hostile state's ability to harm, would provide proof of an imminent threat:

1. Have potential aggressors said they want to harm us in the near future? Or have they harmed us in the recent past?
2. Are potential adversaries moving their forces into a position to do significant harm?<sup>28</sup>

Furthermore, once an imminent threat has been determined, the state wishing to conduct the pre-emptive attack must ensure the attack is likely to succeed, that military force is required (i.e. all other means have been exhausted or there is insufficient time to try other

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/time/dwe/14323.htm>. During Daniel Webster's first term as Secretary of State (1841-1843), the primary foreign policy issues involved Great Britain. These included the northeast borders of the United States, the involvement of American citizens in the Canadian rebellion of 1837, and the suppression of the international slave trade. The Webster-Ashburton Treaty, signed August 9, 1842, resolved these frictions in Anglo-American relations.

<sup>27</sup> Evans, 28.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

means), and that the attack is proportional to the threat. With all four of these criteria met, a pre-emptive attack is justified under the LOAC.<sup>29</sup>

Thus far this paper has argued for the necessary elements for a state to meet the requirements of *Jus Ad Bellum* in order to engage in pre-emptive war. However, explaining how states arrive at the brink of pre-emptive war involves two different international relations theories - the offense-defense balance and the spiral model, which will be utilized here.<sup>30</sup> These theories will be analyzed in detail in the remainder of this chapter to determine the appropriate framework to study the Six-Day War.

### **Offense-Defense Balance**

The offense-defense balance theory was developed by Robert Jervis in 1978 in his landmark text “Cooperation in the Security Dilemma.” Jervis suggested that when a state has a decisive offensive military capability over another state, it makes wars more likely. Jervis further stated that in a scenario between two states where offensive weapons were of greater value than defensive ones (i.e. if a dollar spent on offensive weapons gave a greater benefit than a dollar spent on defensive ones), an arms race could result and both sides would find it beneficial to attack rather than wait to be attacked. Conversely, if the defensive weapons provide greater security to both states, then a stable equilibrium could be reached and an arms race would neither be likely nor required.<sup>31</sup> In essence, two

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<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>30</sup> Reiter, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Jervis, “Cooperation Under The Security Dilemma,” 187.

states with strong defensive capabilities and a scenario that favoured defense (political, geographical, or otherwise) would lend no incentive to one state attacking the other. On the other hand, two states with strong offensive weapons (assuming the states are not friendly with one another) would be in a constant state of fear over the prospect of attack by the other. Jervis' theory suggested that offensive strength lends itself to pre-emptive attack; defensive strength lends itself to states preparing for attack. In *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, Stephen Van Evera used three case studies to test Jervis's offense-defense balance theory, because the offense-defense balance varied over the three periods.<sup>32</sup> He specifically used the United States as their geographical position provided them a naturally defensive position.<sup>33</sup> Van Evera stated that conflict in all three of his chosen eras “. . . can all be explained in large part by offense-defense theory.” However, he also stated that the theory does not explain why offensive strength is often exaggerated, and that state insecurity is often overstated.<sup>34</sup> In “Offense-Defense Theory: An Empirical Assessment,” Gortzak, Haftel, and Sweeney stated that their tests “. . . indicate far less support for ODT than its proponents would expect,” and that “. . . shifts towards offensive advantage have a statistically questionable and substantively small effect on conflict initiation.”<sup>35</sup> Their research indicated that political variables play a greater role in the initiation of conflict. That is, democracies rarely fight one another, and

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<sup>32</sup> Stephen Van Evera, *Causes of War: Power and the Roots of Conflict*, 166-168. Van Evera uses three different periods to test the theory that offensive dominance makes war more likely. He uses Europe since 1789, China during the Warring States period (475-221 BC), and the United States since 1789.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>35</sup> Gortzak, Yoav, Yoram Z. Haftel, and Kevin Sweeney. "Offense-Defense Theory: An Empirical Assessment." *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 1 (Feb., 2005), 86.

the number of powers in the system (i.e. bipolar or multi-polar) is a greater indicator of the possibility of conflict.<sup>36</sup> They also argue that the offense-defense balance can change quickly, and if states are motivated, they will fight regardless of the balance.

### **Spiral Model and Deterrence**

The spiral model of war describes the path to war as a spiralling escalation of fear and mistrust between adversarial states.<sup>37</sup> A combination of misunderstanding, fear, and hostility can lead one state to believe it will be attacked by the other. This belief, coupled with the fear of military defeat, can cause one state to attack the other pre-emptively. Ironically, the use of threats or hostility, caused by the fear or misunderstanding of one state and used to demonstrate readiness for conflict can cause the very conflict the state wished to avoid. The spiral model is based on uncertainty and can be tied to the anarchical nature of world politics and relations. Andrew Kydd's paper "Game Theory and the Spiral Model" provides an excellent example of this. Kydd quoted Count Metternich, the German ambassador to London, who in 1908 wrote the following to his superiors:

The cardinal point of our relations with England lies in the growth of our fleet. Two different views are taken in England about the German Fleet. One section of opinion holds that the fleet is being built for the purpose of attacking England; the supporters of this view point to the assertions of the (German) navy league, and other Anglophobe statements. The other view is that our fleet is not a deliberate threat of

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<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 83. Gortzak, Haftel, and Sweeney state that their research agrees with the premise of democracies not fighting one another, however other authors (Rosato, *The Flawed Logic of Democratic Peace Theory*) argue that the data is based mainly on democratic states since WWII.) The premise remains highly debated, like offense-defense balance theory.

<sup>37</sup> Andrew Kydd. Game Theory and the Spiral Model, in *World Politics* 49 (April, 1997), 371.

aggression, but a possible danger to England . . . The consciousness of this danger naturally increases with the expansion of our fleet.<sup>38</sup>

England was building its fleet to ensure its security, yet at the same time considered Germany's build-up as a threat rather than Germany ensuring its own security. This type of misunderstanding without transparency results in each state accelerating its build-up to match the other.

The Cold War was another manifestation of this theory, with the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR) matching nuclear arms build-ups to ensure parity. While the Cold War never resulted in a pre-emptive war because the doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD) ensured a nuclear stalemate, the spiral theory of mistrust and resultant arms build-up was a central theme. However, this may be more attributable to deterrence theory than spiral theory given the existence and build-up of nuclear weapons by both the US and USSR. Nevertheless, the spiral model and deterrence theory are closely linked; the spiral model posits that any increase in security by one state results in the zero-sum reduction in security of other states around it (this can be either intended or unintended). The state with the perceived reduction in security then builds its military capability to match or exceed that of the first state. Whether this leads to conflict is tied to the deterrence level – if one state feels sufficiently threatened and feels it can attack with fewer consequences than waiting for an attack – a pre-emptive strike may result. If the consequences of an attack are considered too great, deterrence is the decisive factor. In the case of the US and the USSR, both sides had sufficient nuclear weapons to

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 371. The quote relates to the Anglo-German naval build-up of 1908, and comes from Count Metternich, the German Ambassador to London in 1908.

decimate the other, regardless of who started the conflict. As David Sobek wrote in *The Causes of War*:

Nuclear weapons acted as an emergency brake during crises between the Americans and the Soviets: the closer to the brink, the more real the risk of annihilation, the stronger the incentive to pull back from the edge.<sup>39</sup>

In the case examined here, Israel and the Arab states, in 1967, nuclear weapons were not possessed by either side; therefore the deciding factors in this case were the perceived threat of annihilation on the Israeli perspective and the very existence of Israel from the Arab perspective. In either case, the underlying issue is that of misunderstanding between states. Jervis states:

The spiral model of conflict sees the resulting action-reaction dynamic as accelerated by each side's inability to understand the other or to see how the other is interpreting its own behaviour. These processes generate and magnify conflict, leading to unnecessary wars.<sup>40</sup>

The offense-defense balance theory states that war is more likely if a state holds a decisive advantage in offensive capability. The Arab states held a significant advantage over Israel in soldiers, tanks, and aircraft.<sup>41</sup> Israel did not have offensive superiority over the Arab states (based on the number of personnel and weapons), yet they attacked anyway. The offense-defence balance theory is hotly debated, and its detractors state that the theory does not take all factors into account when analyzing wars. The initial attack by a smaller force on a larger one does not fit into the offense-defense balance theory, therefore the theory is not considered applicable for this paper's analysis of the conflict.

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<sup>39</sup> David Sobek. *The Causes of War*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009), 148.

<sup>40</sup> Jervis, *Arms Control, Stability, and the Causes of War*, 244.

<sup>41</sup> The combined Arab states had a two-to-one advantage in every area. Keesing's Research Report – The Arab-Israeli Conflict: the 1967 campaign (insert table)

As a result, this paper will use the spiral model as it is a more appropriate theory to analyze the Six-Day War. The misunderstanding between the Arabs and the Jews are long-standing, but the central issue for the purpose of this paper is the creation of Israel in 1948. Neither side was able to (or cared to) see the other's point of view. Two wars had already been fought in the region and a third was imminent. Both sides considered the land occupied by Israel as their birthright, and were willing to fight for it again. The military build-up and rhetoric by the Arab states was matched by Israel. The war of words and actions, fuelled by misunderstanding, fear, and cultural differences provide a textbook example of the spiral theory.

As stated earlier, the spiral model is based on misunderstanding, an inability of each side of a conflict to grasp or understand the position of the other. The Arab-Israeli situation is a textbook example of misunderstanding; a centuries-old conflict that is based on two completely different interpretations of history. As T.G. Fraser stated in *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*:

The fact that Arabs and Jews had different names for the land they shared reflected their totally different views of its past, present, and future. To the Arabs, Palestine was an Arab land whose soil they had cultivated for generations; as such, it was as entitled to independence as any other Arab country. To the Jews, Israel was a Jewish land that had been their inspiration throughout 18 centuries of dispersion, dispossession and persecution; as such, its destiny was to be the fulfillment of their dreams of statehood. With the proclamation of the State of Israel in May 1948, and her successful defence in the war that followed, Palestine seemed to have vanished from the map of the Middle East, but the Palestinians did not disappear and the quarrel remained, gaining intensity over the following decades.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> T.G. Fraser, *The Arab-Israeli Conflict*, 1. Palestine to the British rulers prior to 1948 was known as Filastin to the Arabs and Eretz Yisrael to the Jewish settlement in Palestine.



The Palestine/Israel question includes two groups of people, two religions, and two interpretations of the same history in direct conflict.

How can two disparate interpretations of history be solved? In this case outside forces decided; as the British left Palestine in 1948, the UN created the State of Israel.

And yet, a final, peaceful solutions still eludes the region. Ahron Bregman described the situation well in *Israel's Wars*:

*A modus vivendi* between the two peoples in Palestine had always been hard to achieve, because here was a clash of *rights* – the claim of two races to one land – and thus any solution could be found only on the lines of least injustice. In their struggle to win the argument and the land, the Jews claimed that the rocky land of Palestine which they called *Eretz Yisrael* was their traditional and spiritual home, one promised by God to Abraham and ‘to [his] posterity’. But the Arabs of Palestine also regarded Palestine as their rightful home, for ‘posterity’, as they saw it, also included themselves, since they were the descendents of Ishmael, Abraham’s son by his concubine Ketirah.<sup>43</sup>

The Jewish inhabitants of Palestine saw the creation of their own state as a way of ending centuries of persecution. The Arabs did not feel that they should be punished for the wrongdoing of others. The Arabs had stayed and settled in the area while the Jewish had left (not by their choice). A solution imposed by outsiders could only benefit one side of the disagreement, a solution described by Bregman as one that caused the least injustice.

This chapter of the paper defined and analyzed *Jus Ad Bellum*, pre-emptive war, the offense-defense balance, the spiral theory, and deterrence. Now that these key concepts have been explored and a framework for studying the conflict chosen, the paper will now turn to the actual events leading up to the Six-Day War from both the Israeli and

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<sup>43</sup> Ahron Bregman, *Israel's Wars: A History Since 1947*, 2. *Modus vivendi* is a Latin phrase signifying an agreement between those whose opinions differ, such that they agree to disagree.

Arab perspectives. The next chapter will focus on Israel's interpretation of the events leading up to the conflict.

## **CHAPTER TWO: THE ISRAELI PERSPECTIVE**

The previous chapter discussed Just War Theory and what constitutes pre-emptive self defense under the Law of Armed Conflict. Now that the theory has been defined, this chapter of the paper will describe the events leading up to the Six-Day War from the Israeli perspective.

Israel had previously fought two wars with its Arab neighbours. The first was fought in 1948 upon Israel's creation by the United Nations (UN), and the second in 1956, which Israel initiated. The Six-Day War in 1967 was initiated by Israel and was fought against a coalition of three Arab states – Egypt, Syria, and Jordan – Israel's neighbours. A number of other states contributed troops and weapons.<sup>44</sup> Tensions in the region had been growing since 1965, with increasing raids by the organization *Al Fatah* ("Conquest"). *Al Fatah* was a Palestinian organization, then classified as a terrorist group by Israel.<sup>45</sup> As the raids against Israel intensified in the fall of 1966, a serious crisis developed in the Middle East. A UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) calling on Syria to prevent the raids was vetoed by the Soviet Union, and Israel conducted military

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<sup>44</sup> The coalition will referred to as the Arab states for the remainder of the paper. Although these three states were the main participants, several other states (Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Morocco, Algeria, Yemen, Tunisia, and Sudan) pledged their support with troops, tanks, aircraft, and declarations of war against Israel.

<sup>45</sup> Keesing's Research Report. *The Arab-Israeli Conflict: The 1967 Campaign*. (New York: Keesing's Publications Limited, 1968), 10.

strikes against Al Fatah in Jordan.<sup>46</sup> Saudi Arabia offered 20,000 troops to Jordan, and it appeared as though war would break out between the two states. Similar tensions were building between Israel and Syria, with ninety terrorist attacks launched from Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan by the end of March.<sup>47</sup> Border skirmishes between Syria and Israel happened almost daily in the last months of 1966 and first few months on 1967; mines were detected on the border by IDF soldiers on December 28, and on December 29 Israeli and Syrian troops exchanged machine gun, mortar, artillery, and tank fire.<sup>48</sup> On April 7, 1967, Syrian mortar attacks led to an exchange of artillery fire and a tank battle, causing the Israelis to launch aircraft on a ground-attack mission. The Syrians responded with fighters, and the resultant air battle resulted in six Syrian fighters shot down.<sup>49</sup> Syria's open support of the continuing terrorist attacks compounded the seriousness of the situation, and led Israel to issue a direct warning to Syria. The Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) Chief of Staff, Major-General Yitzhak Rabin, informed Syria that a continuation of attacks could cause Israel "to take action against the country from which these infiltrators come."<sup>50</sup>

Syria was provoking Israel with its words and support of *Al Fatah's* attacks. However, in reality it was not a significant military threat to Israel. Egypt's military posed the only real threat to Israel in the region; others were simply no match for Israel

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<sup>46</sup> Hammel, Eric. *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the Six-Day War*. (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company), 1992, 19-21.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>49</sup> Keesing., 11; Hammel, 25, Bregman, 66.

<sup>50</sup> Keesing, 12.

on the battlefield, although their continued support to terrorist attacks caused endemic security problems. That said, Israel still faced the prospect of fighting a war on three fronts with no room to absorb a strike. Israel was 14 kilometres wide at its narrowest point. A coordinated strike by Israel's enemies could have conceivably cut the country in half. As figure 2.1 clearly illustrates, Israel's geographical reality was not changed by its military prowess. A war on three fronts remained an existential threat:



Fig 2.1<sup>51</sup>

Other international players were participating in the building regional tensions. The USSR was a key player, repeatedly warning Israel not to attack its neighbours and continued to supply the Arab states with weapons, including Armoured Personnel Carriers (APCs), tanks, and fighter aircraft.<sup>52</sup> The USSR was not pressing for a war in

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/images/maps/67linesnick.gif>

the region and had no interest in participating; rather, they had a personal interest in keeping tensions high, creating a market for arms sales:

The Soviets had much to gain from fomenting trouble in the region. As long as there was instability and intractable hatred afoot between Arab and Jew, there was ample opportunity for the Soviets to strengthen their existing relationships with Arab clients and, indeed, to garner new clients through diplomatic means and the lure of military hardware.<sup>53</sup>

On April 26, 1967 the USSR formally warned Israel not to provoke the Arabs; however they also warned Syria to stop supporting *Fatah* raids.<sup>54</sup> Israel did not know about the Soviet warning to Syria, so as far as they knew the Arab states had the full support of the USSR in the event of a war. This considerably increased the tension in Israel and reinforced the requirement to find a diplomatic solution to the building crisis.

By May of 1967, the likelihood of war was increasing due to actions and misunderstanding on both sides. Continuing *Al Fatah* raids were forcing Israel's hand, despite any consequences an attack would cause. Actions, rhetoric, and misunderstanding would soon turn the threat of war into a shooting war. On May 15 President Abdel Nasser of Egypt placed his military on full alert. Israel, in what it thought was a conciliatory gesture, did not include tanks in its annual Independence Day parade the same day. Rather than diffuse the situation, it had the opposite effect. Egyptian press accused Israel of massing the tanks on the Syrian border. On May 16, Egypt formally requested the removal of the UN's 3400-man peacekeeping contingent

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<sup>52</sup> Hammel, 168, 388, 389. (Egypt's army and air force were outfitted with soviet tanks and planes, and Syria's entire arsenal came from the USSR (550 tanks, over 130 front-line fighters). In addition, Syria had hundreds of USSR military advisors. The US equipment held by the Israelis and the USSR equipment held by the Arab countries enlarges the picture to illustrate the proxy military situation that existed.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

from the Sinai Peninsula. The commander of the force stalled the request, referring it to the Secretary General of the UN, U Thant of Burma. U Thant acquiesced to the request, withdrawing the entire force from the Sinai, leaving nothing between the Egyptian forces and the Israeli border.<sup>55</sup> On May 18, Israel called up its reserve forces, which caused Egypt to do the same. Forces in Iraq and Lebanon were also placed on alert. Despite the growing likelihood of a conflict, Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol resisted calls for an immediate military strike. He felt as though Nasser's true intentions had not yet been revealed, and this view was shared by General Yitzhak Rabin.<sup>56</sup>

By many accounts, President Nasser was creating an elaborate bluff, hoping that a show of strength on the Sinai would cause Israel to back down.<sup>57</sup> The Egyptian military, however, seemed to believe that the re-militarization of the Sinai would force Israel's hand to attack, allowing the much-larger Arab force to respond and defeat the Jewish state.<sup>58</sup> Whether or not Nasser and the other Arab states truly wanted a war will be analyzed further in the next section of the paper; for the purpose of this section, the Israeli view of the military build-up and increased rhetoric will be explored.

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. The UNEF had been placed on the Egyptian side of the Sinai border at Israel's request, leaving the authority to remove the force entirely in Egypt's hands.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 30; Jeremy Bowen, *Six Days*, 60; Michael Oren, *Six Days of War*, 57. Even the CIA felt that this was a bluff by Egypt. While Syria was pressing for war with Israel, Egypt was the only regional state capable of matching Israeli military strength. The CIA's view was Israel could easily defeat its Arab neighbours if it struck first, and would still win if it waited to be attacked. Israel, though, did not share such an optimistic view.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 145. The Egyptian military had created a plan for the *defence* of the Sinai, named Operation Kahir. It was based on the premise of an Israeli attack, and planned to lure the Israeli military deep into the Sinai, where the superior numbers of Egyptian tanks, aircraft, and soldiers would overwhelm the attackers.

The next, and likely final, flashpoint came on May 22 with the Egyptian announcement that it would blockade the Straits of Tiran to all Israeli or Israel-bound shipping traffic. The Straits of Tiran are the only waterway to the Israeli port of Eilat, and a similar Egyptian blockade of the straits up until 1956 had been one of the reasons Israel had launched a war with French and British backing in 1956. Israel had returned the Sinai Peninsula to Egypt following the war in 1956 based on UN guarantees of access to the straits. The removal of the UN troops from the Sinai removed the UN guarantee, and the Egyptian blockade of the Tiran strait was something Israel had previously declared a *Casus Belli*.<sup>59</sup> But was it a *Casus Belli*? Using the *jus ad bellum* parameters from chapter one, the answer is clearly no. At this point the blockade was merely a declaration; it had not been put to the test by Israeli shipping. Therefore, all options had not yet been exhausted. Global reaction to the blockade did little to assuage Israeli fears. American President Lyndon Johnson provided a very non-committal statement, calling the Straits of Tiran an international waterway and that the closure was “illegal and potentially dangerous to peace.”<sup>60</sup> The USSR blamed Israel for the continued tensions in the Middle East.<sup>61</sup> However, privately they were concerned that Nasser’s actions could potentially cause a direct confrontation with the United States.<sup>62</sup> Prime Minister Eshkol

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<sup>59</sup> Edgar O’Ballance. *The Third Arab-Israeli War*. (Hamden, Conn: Archon Books, 1972), 153.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Oren, 118-120; Ro’i and Morozov, *The Soviet Union and the June 1967 Six Day War*, 131, 134. The Premier of the Soviet Union, Alexey Kosygin, made public speeches blaming Israel for the increased tension, and wrote a letter to Prime Minister Eshkol indicating the Soviet Union would assist the Arab states if they were attacked.

<sup>62</sup> Ro’I and Morozov, 136.

called the closure of the straits “an act of aggression against Israel”<sup>63</sup> Despite the provocative tone of these words, Israel was not yet ready to start a war over the closure of the straits. Egypt had merely declared a blockade; the blockade had not yet been put into effect or tested. In other words, the mere statement of a blockade did not constitute one. The Israeli cabinet met in emergency session and discussed their options. General Rabin remained concerned about the possibility of a two-front war with Egypt and Syria and a possible third front with Jordan.<sup>64</sup> His main concern was with the Soviet Union. The USSR had been antagonistic in their statements toward Israel (although they were also cautioning Syria and Egypt privately, this was unknown to Israel), and then publicly stated that should Israel attack an Arab state pre-emptively it would be considered an attack on the Soviet Union.<sup>65</sup>

Israel was surrounded by hostile states seemingly intent on starting or provoking a war, states that appeared to have the backing of a superpower. The UN did not help matters by removing their peacekeeping forces from the Sinai (although they were legally obliged to once Egypt requested it), and Israel’s traditional supporter, the US, only provided vague statements of support concerning the Straits of Tiran closure. President Johnson told Israel that they would “only be alone if they acted alone,” a clear message not to start a war with the Arab states.<sup>66</sup> The USSR stated they would not allow outside interference in any Middle East war, a clear message to the US. President Johnson asked

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<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 29; Keesing’s Report, 18.

<sup>64</sup> Gluska, 168.

<sup>65</sup> Matthew J. Flynn. *FIRST STRIKE: Preemptive War in Modern History*. (New York: Routledge, 2008), 187.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 186; Gluska, 182.



Israel for a cooling off period, desperate to avoid a conflict. Prime Minister Eshkol agreed, observing that the next oil tanker bound for Eilat was not due to arrive for a week. This would give Israel time to determine whether the blockade was actually in effect or if it was merely talk. His concluding remarks to the cabinet meeting indicated that the military was ready to attack, but he was not yet in favour of a strike:

Summing up the discussion, he said: ‘I understand that the army is of the opinion that we should wait no longer.’ He was evidently implying that the army’s viewpoint would be presented to the government, but that he personally was against immediate warfare, both in light of Johnson’s message [Johnson had sent a secret message to Israel indicating it supported Israel’s right to strike if Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran] and because, until the Straits were actually blocked, there was respite for diplomatic action.<sup>67</sup>

Words were not sufficient to cause a blockade of the Straits of Tiran. Until a physical blockade was enforced by military means, Egypt was merely threatening with words.

Words do not constitute an imminent threat, and therefore a case for pre-emption was not yet in place.

The previous section of this paper described the necessary elements for a state to consider a pre-emptive strike: whether hostile forces were mobilizing, whether those forces had been hostile in the past, and whether all diplomatic means had been exhausted. Egypt had mobilized its forces in the Sinai Peninsula; Syria had supported repeated terrorist attacks against Israel and had fought numerous skirmishes on the Golan Heights. Despite multiple provocations, Israel continued to use diplomatic means to diffuse the situation. A case for pre-emption was building, and no one appeared capable of stopping it. Short of a diplomatic solution or the intervention of the superpowers, Israel would soon be at war with its Arab neighbours.

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<sup>67</sup> Gluska, 154.

In chapter one, two elements that enable a case of pre-emption were discussed:

1. Have potential aggressors said they want to harm us in the near future? Or have they harmed us in the recent past?
2. Are potential adversaries moving their forces into a position to do immediate and significant harm?

Arab statements and rhetoric indicated that they wanted war with Israel, forces in Egypt were mobilized in the Sinai, and multiple clashes between Israel and Syria had taken place. Israel had a case for pre-emption, but needed to exhaust all other avenues before striking. Israel continued its military build-up to counter the Egyptian one in the Sinai. An additional 30,000 reserve forces were mobilized, bringing the total number to 155,000.<sup>68</sup> Israel's military included 250,000 men and women, although only 50,000 of those were regular, full-time soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Of that total, 25,000 were in the air force and navy, leaving 225,000 in the army – 70,000 of which were older men used for second-line units.<sup>69</sup> The Arab states totalled nearly 450,000 men, or double the Israeli numbers. The Arab states also held a two-to-one advantage in tanks and aircraft.<sup>70</sup> Israel's military was considered the best trained and equipped force in the Middle East. However, it still faced the prospect of a two- or three-front war. General Rabin was greatly concerned over the prospect of the Arab states attacking first, and exerted

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<sup>68</sup> Hammel, *Six Days in June*, 149. The reported number of troops on both sides varies widely, however Hammel's book gives numbers that are well defined by service and number of divisions. His totals include four Israeli ground divisions totaling approximately 155,000 men; 3 divisions (roughly 120,000 men) were lined up against approximately 170,000 Egyptian forces in the Sinai, although only 100,00 of the Egyptian troops were considered 'front-line' troops.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>70</sup> Keesing's Report, 40. The Arab manpower numbers merely indicate quantity and do not tell the whole story. Israel's military was the finest in the Middle East, and only Egypt's military came close.

increasing pressure on the Prime Minister to act before it was too late. Rabin met with Eshkol and Intelligence Chief Yariv in late May, where he outlined his key concerns:

In view of the real danger of an Arab attack, the IDF must deliver the first blow and launch a pre-emptive strike before the enemy completed preparing its forces. Any delay would not only increase the critical risk of a pan-Arab attack but would improve the logistic and operational organization of the enemy forces, thereby placing the IDF at a disadvantage and endangering the success of its efforts even if it acted first.<sup>71</sup>

The military was growing increasingly impatient and fearful of an Arab first strike, while the Prime Minister remained hopeful of an American diplomatic solution, or at the very least a guarantee of security by the US. General Rabin sent another urgent message to the Prime Minister on May 25, and there was no doubting the urgency in the tone:

We are on the verge of an explosion. The question is – what are we waiting for and for how long? The problem is not the Straits. The problem is willingness or unwillingness to decide. The Straits have become a secondary issue. If the Americans are ready to issue a declaration that any attack on us is an attack on the United States, that might be a reason to wait. Otherwise – no!<sup>72</sup>

By this point Israeli intelligence had received indications of a possible Egyptian air attack on May 27. The urgent nature of the messages from Rabin to Eshkol caused Israel to immediately cable the United States and ask for assistance. The US still believed that the IDF would easily win a war against the Arab states, but nonetheless issued a warning to Egypt that it would intervene in case of an Egyptian attack.<sup>73</sup> This message to Egypt, plus the diplomatic messages sent to Israel from both the US and the USSR, seemed to give

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<sup>71</sup> Gluska, 165.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 168.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

Israel hope that a diplomatic solution was still possible.<sup>74</sup> By May 28, Israel's political leadership was determined to wait for a diplomatic solution, regardless of the pressure being exerted by the IDF.

### **Tipping Point**

Only two days later, the tipping point for the Six-Day War occurred. Jordan's King Hussein bin Talal, who until now had been a less-than-enthusiastic participant in the build-up towards war with Israel, flew to Cairo to meet with President Nasser for the purpose of placing Jordanian forces under Egyptian command. Hussein and Nasser had been sworn enemies until this point, but given the increasing popularity and influence of Nasser in the Arab world, King Hussein decided to join forces with Egypt, something he declared a life insurance policy.<sup>75</sup> Jordan's entry into the coalition allowed Iraqi forces to enter Jordan and meant Israel faced a true three-front war. Figure 2.1 (pg 26) shows the strategic nature posed by the three fronts. Prior to this security pact between Egypt and Jordan, Israel felt that Jordan would offer only token support to the Arab effort. King Hussein and President Nasser were not allies, and Jordan's military was small, presenting no real threat to the IDF. This new arrangement changed the nature of the threat from difficult to existential. In the view of the IDF, Israel no longer had a choice – it had to attack first. By the beginning of June, the IDF had changed its tone with the government

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<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 217. Hussein and Nasser were sworn enemies; however King Hussein faced a serious dilemma. The repeated calls for the "liberation of Palestine," coupled with the large Palestinian population in Jordan, forced him to be a part of the Arab coalition or face a possible coup or even death following an Arab victory over Israel. This exposed a third front for Israel to defend, a front it considered a soft underbelly. This was the tipping point and likely prompted the decision to strike first.

from pleading for action to demanding action. Every day Israel waited, the Egyptian Army grew stronger. At a meeting between the IDF general staff and the cabinet on June 2, one IDF general after another demanded the government take action. The sharpest comments came from Brigadier General Matti Peled, the Chief of the IDF Quartermaster Branch. Speaking of President Nasser's increasingly bold moves, he said:

In my opinion he was relying on the hesitation of the Israeli government. He acted in the confidence that we would not dare to hit at him . . . Nasser moved an army which was not ready to the border and he derived full advantage from the move. One fact is acting in his favour and that is the fact that the Israel government is not ready to act against him.<sup>76</sup>

President Nasser's own comments, given six days earlier on May 26, seem to confirm General Peled's view:

The Arab world today is different from the Arab world of ten days ago, and the same is true of Israel. The Arabs are firmly resolved to realize their rights and they will restore the rights of the Arabs of Palestine. We are confident of victory over Israel . . . The blocking of the Straits means entering into an all-out battle with Israel. This requires preparations. When we felt ourselves to be ready, we did this . . . If we are attacked, it will be war and our fundamental objective will be the destruction of Israel.<sup>77</sup>

Nasser's confidence grew based on Israel's inaction; this in turn caused Jordan to join the Arab alliance and increased the threat to Israel.

Israel decided to strike first, and sent the Director of the Mossad, Meir Amit, to Washington so he could brief the head of the CIA, Richard Helms. While in Helm's office, Amit also briefed Robert McNamara, the US Secretary of Defense. He told

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<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 227.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 185; taken from document 1 of T. Draper's book *Israel and World Politics – Roots of the Third Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Viking Press, 1968).

McNamara that Israel had decided to go to war, and received a clear message in return – the US would not try and stop them.<sup>78</sup> The final obstacle had been removed, and Israel was ready to launch the first strike in the Six Day War.

Tensions in the Middle East began rising in 1965 with increased terrorist attacks by *Al Fatah* against Israel, attacks supported by Syria and launched from Syria and Jordan. Increasing rhetoric by President Nasser of Egypt was tacitly supported by the Soviet Union and led Egypt to the request the removal UN security force in the Sinai. Egypt then occupied the Sinai, formed a mutual defense pact with Syria, and announced a blockade of the Straits of Tiran, a move Israel declared an act of war. Still, Israel hoped for a diplomatic solution, something that both concerned the commanders of the IDF and emboldened Nasser. At the end of May 1967 a diplomatic solution appeared to be in the works, until Jordan signed a similar mutual defense pact with Egypt. This move was likely one of self-preservation by King Hussein of Jordan, but nevertheless it created the prospect of a three-front war for Israel. This move, coupled with the hostile rhetoric directed at Israel from across the Arab world, forced it to act.

Jervis's spiral model states that the misunderstanding of intentions between states can lead to conflict. A state, unsure of another state's motives and intentions, coupled with the fear of military defeat, can be driven to attack. The Israeli-Arab situation is driven by two parallel yet vastly different interpretations of history. The build-up to the Six-Day War was filled with hostile statements and actions by both sides, and as was demonstrated in this chapter, filled with the misunderstanding and misperception of those actions by both parties. This chapter of the paper has detailed the build-up to the Six Day

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<sup>78</sup> Bowen, 86.

War from the Israeli perspective. The next chapter will look at the build-up from the Arab perspective, and will examine whether the provocative moves and rhetoric were an actual threat, or merely bravado by a President intent on keeping power in his state and building influence across the Arab world.

### **CHAPTER THREE: THE ARAB PERSPECTIVE**

The last chapter dealt exclusively with the Israeli perspective of the build-up to the Six-Day War. As in any conflict, there are two sides, and it is important to look at the prelude to the conflict through the eyes of the three Arab states involved. Based on the evidence presented in the last section, it would appear as if Israel had no choice but to launch an attack - three states surrounding Israel had signed mutual defence pacts, built up their forces, had continually stated their objective of annihilating Israel, and rallied the support of the entire Arab world. Many in the Arab world still resented the creation of Israel and saw favouritism from the UN towards the Jewish state. Despite this resentment of the Jewish state and how it had come into being, no Arab state in the region had any hope of defeating it militarily. Israel had defeated an Arab coalition in 1948 despite being a fledgling state with no standing army, and had done so again in 1956. Infighting and rivalries among Arab states sabotaged any possibility of a strong coalition to stand up to Israel, especially when Israel was backed by the United States. President Nasser of Egypt was battling for his very survival in Egypt; if he could rally his state and the Arab people, he would be able to remain as president and simultaneously undo what he considered a grave injustice – the creation of Israel. Whether the Arab rhetoric and

military build-up of 1967 was an actual threat of war or merely a ploy by President Nasser of Egypt to remain in power will be the focus of this chapter. The chapter will be broken down into three sections; each section will deal with the narrative of each of the main Arab states involved in the conflict – Jordan, Syria, and Egypt.

## **Jordan**

Jordan was the smallest state in the conflict, with a large population of Palestinians displaced after the creation of Israel in 1948. Jordan was a monarchy, ruled by King Hussein. Jordan had a small but well-trained army that had fought with the British during the Second World War, numbering 60,000 men.<sup>79</sup> On the morning of November 13, 1966 Jordan began down the path to war with Israel. There had been mounting attacks against Israel, and while many of the attacks originated in (and were supported by) Syria, some had originated in Jordan. On a routine patrol on November 12, three Israeli soldiers had been killed when their vehicle hit a landmine. Israel believed the mine had been placed by terrorists (Israel called them terrorists, Arab states would call them resistance fighters)<sup>80</sup> living in the Jordanian village of Es Samu, so it raided the village on November 13.<sup>81</sup> Two Israeli raiding parties with over 500 men and over 100 armoured vehicles supported by aircraft entered the village in order to blow up several

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<sup>79</sup> Keesing's report, 40.

<sup>80</sup> This is a key aspect in the dueling historical narratives and interpretations in the wider Middle East conflict, central to the spiral model used in this paper. Israel classified the attack as a terrorist attack; however to the Palestinians conducting the attack, they were attacking a military target via the only means at their disposal. Al Fatah could not win a direct military confrontation, therefore they used guerilla tactics.

<sup>81</sup> Bowen, 24.



buildings in retaliation for the mine strike. Three companies of Jordanian infantry fought with the Israelis and in the end three Jordanian civilians and 15 soldiers were killed, and 140 buildings were destroyed.<sup>82</sup> King Hussein was taken completely by surprise. He had been holding secret meetings with Israel in the years prior to the raid, working towards peace and doing everything in his power to stop the attacks originating in Jordan.<sup>83</sup> The day of the El Samu raid he had received a note from Israel stating it would not attack Jordan. King Hussein saw the attack as a betrayal of his efforts towards achieving peace with Israel. These efforts had to be conducted in secret because of the ongoing threat from radical elements within Jordan to his throne, elements who called for a revolution in Jordan due to King Hussein's lack of belligerence towards Israel. Speaking to the US Ambassador and the CIA Chief of Station, he said of the attack:

[It was] a complete betrayal of everything I had tried to do for the past three years in the interests of peace, stability, and moderation at high personal political risk. Strangely, despite our secret agreements, understandings and assurances, I never fully trusted their intentions towards me or towards Jordan. This is what one gets for trying to be a moderate, or perhaps for being stupid.<sup>84</sup>

King Hussein felt that Israel wanted to secure the West Bank to ensure its security, and that the 'only option he had left was irrevocable hostility.'<sup>85</sup> While Jordan was in no position to retaliate militarily, the attack on Samua was nonetheless a disaster for Israel. The UN condemned the attack as well out of proportion to the mine strike, and the attack

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<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>83</sup> Vance and Lauer, *Hussein of Jordan: My "War" with Israel*, 25-26. This book provides a view of the attack on El Samu in King Hussein's own words. He had closed the offices of the PLO in Jordan, trying to stop the raids on Israel, and was surprised by this "punitive" raid by Israel. See also Bowen, 25.

<sup>84</sup> Bowen., 26.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

on Samua caused a swell of Arab anger. Despite many of the terrorist attacks originating in Syria, Israel had focused its revenge on Jordan, giving Egypt and Syria the impression that Israel was afraid of a direct confrontation due to the defence pact between those two states. Instead of acting as a deterrent towards Syria, the attack merely made them feel more secure. Israel had intended to send a message to its neighbours by conducting a raid in retribution for what it perceived as a terrorist attack, but all it succeeded in doing was embolden two enemies and create a third.

## Syria

Syria was the most belligerent of the three Arab states aligned against Israel, yet it had the most poorly-trained and -equipped military in the conflict. Syria's military consisted of approximately 50,000 troops, 500 tanks (only half of which were in working condition), and 100 MiG-17 fighters.<sup>86</sup> Syria's biggest concern in 1966-67 was that its complaints to the UN regarding Israel's incursions on its territory were ignored. An Israeli air raid on July 14, 1966 was protested by Syria at the UN to no avail. Syria decided to respond to Israeli military actions with its own. On August 15, 1966 an Israeli gunboat ran aground near Syria on the Sea of Galilee, contrary to an agreement that Israeli Navy vessels would stay a minimum of 250 metres from Syrian territory. Syria

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<sup>86</sup> Patrick Seale. *Asad of Syria: The Struggle for the Middle East*. (London, England: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 1988), 117. Seale describes the weakest part of the Syrian military, its officers and high command. Broken by the many purges and coups in the years leading up to the Six-Day War, the military was a sea of shifting alliances.

responded by launching fighters, two of which were shot down.<sup>87</sup> Syria's role in the region seemed to be one of starting fights and hoping others would finish them. Syria's government had the luxury of knowing the Soviet Union protected them, allowing them to goad Israel without fear of major reprisal. A 1966 coup in Syria led to increased government interest in *Fatah*, and the government took control of the movement in July of that year, leading to more raids into Israeli territory.<sup>88</sup> In October of 1966, the Soviet Union told Syria that Israel was massing troops along the Syrian border, and re-affirmed that it would support Syria in the event of an attack by Israel. This prompted the Syrian government to officially announce its support for *Fatah* and sign a mutual defense agreement with Egypt, stating that Syrian forces would fight alongside Egyptian forces, under Egyptian command, in the event of a conflict between Israel and either state.<sup>89</sup>

Prior to the agreement with Egypt, Israel had been strongly considering a major attack on Syria, one designed to protect their northern flank from shelling coming from the Golan Heights. General Rabin had remarked to a visiting British officer that Israel planned a "large-scale operation to occupy the Syrian border areas, including all the high ground . . . with maximum destruction of Syrian personnel and equipment."<sup>90</sup> However, this agreement between two potential Israeli adversaries was an ominous development and likely scuttled any plans for a major attack. Unknown to the Israelis however, there were caveats attached to the defense agreement. There would not be an automatic

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<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>88</sup> O'Ballance, 19.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 20.

<sup>90</sup> Bowen, 22.

response by either state in the event of an attack; rather assistance would be rendered after consultations between governments. Furthermore, rivalries and suspicions between Syria and its two partners made the mutual defence pact a hollow one:

But there appear to have been other causes at work also. Deep-seated suspicion between the Syrians and their former UAR partners in Egypt, as well as their outright hostility toward Jordan, left the joint command mainly on paper.<sup>91</sup>

Again, what Israel considered a potential threat was simply more posturing by Nasser to give the appearance of leadership without putting his armed forces at risk if Israel and Syria began hostilities. Nasser believed that the agreement would contain Syria, but instead it emboldened them.<sup>92</sup> The strength of the agreement was revealed on April 7, a battle that occurred with little warning or political forethought, but a battle that would have serious strategic implications in the weeks that followed. Israeli work in the southern demilitarized zone resulted in Syrian artillery fire, a typical reaction to work by the Israelis at the foot of the Golan Heights. In this instance, however, the usual exchange of artillery and tank fire grew into an air-to-air battle between Syrian and Israeli fighters. The Israeli reaction could be seen as a serious overreaction and escalation. Israel would normally respond if the shelling reached a settlement, usually the village of Tel Katzir. This exchange of fire resulted in a few stray shells hitting Tel Katzir, but no direct targeting. The Israeli response was over 170 sorties of aircraft, including fighters circling over Damascus, and 65 tons of bombs and ordnance were dropped.<sup>93</sup> Despite this serious incident, an air-to-air and air-to-ground battle between Israeli and Syrian

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<sup>91</sup> Isabella Ginor and Gideon Remez, *Foxbats Over Dimona: The Soviets' Nuclear Gamble in the Six-Day War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 193.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>93</sup> Gluska, 102.

fighters that left six Syrian MiGs destroyed, no assistance was rendered by the Egyptian Air Force. The skirmish did result in the USSR sternly warning the Israelis against aggression, however.<sup>94</sup> Such a move by the Israelis could have been viewed as possible foreshadowing of an Israeli attack on Syria, although the Soviet threat, coupled with the Syrian-Egyptian alliance, made it difficult for Israel to consider such an attack. While Israel was most hostile to Syria, Israel knew that its main opponent in any war would inevitably be Egypt. In the end, Israel would be forced to attack on the Egyptian front first, leaving Syria open to attack Israel with impunity from the Golan Heights.<sup>95</sup>

Syria was Israel's most vocal and belligerent neighbour, but it was also a weak one. It was capable of launching harassing artillery fire on Israel's northern flank, but was incapable of inflicting any major damage (other than psychological). Syria felt that if its complaints at the UN of Israeli attacks were ignored, its only recourse was to meet military force with military force. This was a failed option, fuelled by the desperation of having no serious international support. The USSR provided (outdated) weapons and provided a measure of protection for the fledgling Ba'athist regime, but provided no protection from repeated Israeli attacks in the days prior to the war. Its support of *Fatah* raids were a source of irritation to Israel, and prompted Israel to plan a major retaliatory strike. Direct confrontation had not worked, and now indirect confrontation through a proxy had also failed. Before Israel could act, Syria signed a mutual defense pact with Israel's most dangerous adversary, Egypt. While not a definitive or binding pact of mutual defence, it was enough to give Israel pause from planning a major raid on Syria,

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<sup>94</sup> O'Ballance., 21.

<sup>95</sup> Hammel, 17.

and likely caused Israel to instead conduct the raid on Samua, a raid that would have implications just as serious. While Syria posed no military danger to Israel, it was capable of political moves as dangerous as or more dangerous than military ones.

## **Egypt**

Jordan had been forced into the Arab alliance against Israel by an Israeli raid and pressure from Egypt and Syria. Syria was itching for a fight with Israel, despite having a poorly equipped and trained military that stood no chance against Israel. For there to even be a war, Egypt had to be involved. Egypt was the only state in the Middle East that had any chance against Israel, and whether or not it even wanted a war with Israel is the subject of much debate. Certainly some of its actions can be easily seen as provocative and even openly hostile towards Israel, but how much of this can be attributed to an actual desire for war, and how much can be attributed to a somewhat weak president desperate to hold on to power? The relationship between President Nasser and Egyptian Defence Chief of Staff Zaid Ibn Shaker played a major role in the build-up.<sup>96</sup> Despite half of the Egyptian Army being deployed in Yemen, Shaker assured Nasser that Egypt could win a conflict with Israel.<sup>97</sup> These issues will be analyzed and answered in this section.

In late 1966 and early 1967, the increased tensions in the region over the continued attacks against Israel led many to believe that a conflict between Israel and

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<sup>96</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*

Syria was imminent. The Soviet Union informed President Nasser that it believed Israel was going to attack in late May.<sup>98</sup> It seems odd that the Soviet Union would warn Israel to curb its aggression on the one hand, and inform Egypt of an impending attack on the other. This would lend credibility to the scenario discussed in the last chapter; that the USSR were keen on building tensions in the region in order to continue supplying arms to the various states.<sup>99</sup> As the major Arab power in the world, Egypt became the center of the anti-Israeli movement in times of crisis. Egypt declared a full military alert and requested that the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) leave the Sinai Peninsula. However, this move may have been a ploy on the behalf of President Nasser. When Major General Indarjit Rikhye, the Indian commander of UNEF, received the request, he informed Egypt that he did not have the authority to respond to such a request and would have to forward it to UN Headquarters for approval. This response appeared to please Nasser greatly, making it seem as though he wanted to build a crisis but not actually start a war.<sup>100</sup> Unfortunately for Nasser, UN Secretary General U Thant agreed to the request and removed UNEF from the Sinai Peninsula.<sup>101</sup> A key element of the request to remove UNEF was the omission of the UNEF forces stationed at Sharm el-Sheikh. This outpost at the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula protected the Israeli access to Eilat, through the Straits of Tiran. When U Thant announced the withdrawal of the UNEF, he stated

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<sup>98</sup> Hisham Sharabi from Abu-Lughod, Ibrahim, ed. *The Arab-Israeli Confrontation of June 1967: An Arab Perspective*. (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), 50.

<sup>99</sup> Cited in chapter two from Hammel, 27 (footnote 50); and later in this chapter from Ro'I and Morozov, footnote 115.

<sup>100</sup> Hammel, 30.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 31. While this is a repeat of information provided in the last chapter, it is re-stated to put Nasser's request and frame of mind in context.

implicitly that Egypt had the right to request the removal of the force in its *entirety*.<sup>102</sup> This crucial distinction forced Nasser to request their removal as well. Nasser had bluffed on UNEF and been called; now he needed to back up his words with more action. Nasser was hoping to generate enough tension to cause the international community to step in and diffuse the situation, as they had done in 1956.<sup>103</sup> The removal of UNEF opened the door for Egypt to announce the blockade of the Straits of Tiran, a provocative move sure to provoke Israel. The port of Eilat, however, was not of great importance to Israel from an economic perspective. In fact, despite the huge political nature of the move, no Israeli-flagged vessel had entered Eilat for years, making the blockade symbolic at best.<sup>104</sup> It seems again that this move was geared more towards scoring political points with the Arab people than it was provoking Israel. Nasser continued to make seemingly hostile moves towards Israel, yet there seemed to be no outward reaction, which only emboldened Nasser more. A conciliatory speech by Israeli Prime Minister Eshkol only strengthened Nasser's view that the blockade was a safe move to make. If anything, the move would cause Israel to make the first move and allow Egypt and its allies to launch what he considered would be a devastating counterattack.<sup>105</sup>

Some of Nasser's public statements indicate that he was not prepared to fight a war with Israel. Of his increasingly bold military and political moves, many appeared to

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<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>103</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



be theatre, orchestrated to inflame Arab pride while not actually threatening Israel. In May of 1967 he said the following:

I am not in a position to go to war; I tell you this frankly, and it is not shameful to say it publicly. To go to war without having the sufficient means would be to lead the country and the people to disaster.<sup>106</sup>

Nasser's gambit appeared to be to get Israel to the table and negotiate from a position of strength. He wanted to achieve a victory for the Palestinian people, something they had longed for since 1948.<sup>107</sup> Charles Yost, the US special envoy to Cairo stated on June 4 that "There does not seem to have been any intention in Cairo to initiate a war," and President Nasser told British MP Christopher Mayhew that "if the Israelis do not attack 'we will leave them alone. We have no intention of attacking Israel.'"<sup>108</sup> What should be believed then – Nasser's words or Nasser's actions? Some of Nasser's statements indicate a willingness to initiate conflict with Israel or respond to an Israeli attack. Other statements – the quote above for example – indicate the exact opposite. One of Nasser's actions seems to indicate he never intended to attack Israel. On May 26, Egyptian forces were given orders to strike Israel, but Nasser cancelled them on May 27.<sup>109</sup> He decided to wait until either a diplomatic solution was achieved or Israel attacked, allowing a coordinated Arab response. Either result would allow Nasser to save face and remain the symbolic head of the Arab world.<sup>110</sup> The intense diplomatic efforts (and threats) by the

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<sup>106</sup> Sharabi from Abu-Lughod, 53.

<sup>107</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010.

<sup>108</sup> Sharabi from Abu-Lughod, 55.

<sup>109</sup> Gluska, 170.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 170. This scenario is offered by Gluska as one possible reason for why Egypt never went ahead with an attack of its own.

US at the eleventh hour prevented Egypt from attacking (if they had planned to), yet the US was simultaneously giving Israel a virtual green light:

Is it surprising, therefore, that the Egyptians accused the United States of a plot against them? As far as they were concerned, when the US administration laid a heavy restraining hand on them it freed Israel of restraints and enabled it to exploit the vast advantage of dealing the initial blow. This fact, which is true in itself, was the basis for the charges against the United States of a 'conspiracy' with Israel against the Arabs, claims in which the Egyptians believed wholeheartedly.<sup>111</sup>

Of all Nasser's words and actions, his final miscalculation was his receiving of King Hussein and the signing a defense agreement with Jordan. Although initiated by King Hussein as a move of self-preservation and encouraged by Nasser to strengthen his position with the Palestinians (and also prompted by Israel's raid on Samua), this act pushed Israel to the tipping point of war. Nasser had succeeded in bluffing Israel up to this point (as war had not yet started),<sup>112</sup> and it is quite possible that this move was yet another political calculation, however regardless of its reason or origin; it led to an attack by Israel on June 5.

### **The Soviet Union**

The role of the Soviet Union in the months leading up to the war was perplexing. They repeatedly warned Israel not to initiate hostilities and threatened action if their allies were attacked, yet they simultaneously warned President Nasser not to antagonize Israel. In April and May, responding to increasing Israeli threats towards Syria, the USSR

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<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>112</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010.

provided Syria with inflated Israeli troop numbers along their border and indicated that an Israeli attack was likely between May 17 and 22.<sup>113</sup> The USSR did not want to see Israel attack Syria and overthrow their government; Syria was a USSR-backed state, and an Israeli attack could see the possibility of a pro-western government take the place of the pro-Soviet Ba'ath government. It is very likely the USSR wished to capitalize on regional instability by selling more arms to Arab states and offset what they saw as American imperialism in the region, channelled through Israel. They did not want a war however, based on their increased diplomatic messages to both sides and their engagement with the US in the days leading up to the war.<sup>114</sup> On June 20, USSR General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev presented the official Soviet Union version of the Six-Day War to the Central Committee in a report titled "The Soviet Union's Policy Regarding Israel's Aggression in the Middle East." In addition to denying the allegation that the Soviet Union had encouraged Arab states to threaten Israel, the report stated "We have helped and are continuing to help the Arab states, but not in any way because we share the view of some Arab leaders regarding the obliteration of the State of Israel."<sup>115</sup> The report also included a definitive statement on the official USSR policy at the time – the imperative of keeping the Middle East conflict from escalating into all-out war between the great powers.<sup>116</sup> Israel's ambassador to the Soviet Union, Katriel Katz, sent a

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<sup>113</sup> Yair Even from Ro'i and Morozov, 79.

<sup>114</sup> Yair Even from Ro'i and Morozov, 80. Brezhnev wanted to protect the Syrian regime rather than threaten Israel. Brezhnev even admitted that sending the fleet to the eastern Mediterranean was designed to protect Syria, not threaten Israel.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.

message to his government at the end of May 1967, detailing what he thought was an elaborate conspiracy by the USSR. His view of the situation was:

the outcome of a joint conspiracy and plan of the Soviets and Syria, Egypt, Iraq, and Algeria to drive the West away for the oil resources and from the vicinity of Turkey and Iran. Israel is intended to be the victim of this crusade, on the assumption that the Arab-Israeli war will restore the revolutionary states to leadership of the entire world, and UN intervention will be paralyzed by a Soviet veto and the Western powers will hesitate to intervene both for fear of Soviet intervention and because they themselves are occupied elsewhere.<sup>117</sup>

It is more likely that the USSR merely wanted to increase their influence in the region at the expense of the US. Their cautionary note to Egypt in the early morning of May 26 is good evidence of this view rather than the conspiratorial nature of the Israeli ambassador's view.<sup>118</sup> The irony is that their actions, specifically the warning of Israeli troop concentrations on the Syrian border, pushed the region towards war rather than away from it. The USSR never intended to defend the Arab states, nor did the Arab states specifically ask for Russian military intervention. Rather, they pressed the USSR to speed the advance of military hardware.<sup>119</sup> The Soviet Union intended to convince Nasser to take a larger leadership role, protect Syria, and decrease US influence in the Middle East:

The Soviets wanted to gain enough time to arm the Arab countries in such a manner that Israel would think twice before attacking. Simultaneously, the Soviets would engage in a diplomatic campaign geared at neutralizing the West and getting it to restrain Israel. A further Soviet goal was to gradually push the West to accept the new

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<sup>117</sup> Gluska, 184 & 185.

<sup>118</sup> Even from Ro'I and Morozov, 81 & 57. The Russian government sent a message to Nasser on May 26, stressing the need to 'spare no effort' to head off a military confrontation.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 85.

status quo, thus fortifying Soviet/Arab gains an averting an unwanted conflagration.<sup>120</sup>

What Nasser did with the information garnered from the USSR was request the removal of UNEF from the Sinai in order to build up his own forces as a show of strength. Misunderstanding of intentions once again played a key role in the build up towards war; in this case, it was a misunderstanding of intentions between allies that pushed the region to the brink.

### **The United States (US)**

If the USSR was intent on using the Arab states as their medium of projecting influence in the region, the US was its mirror image, using Israel. While the USSR stood to benefit from a conflict through arms sales and anti-Western sentiment, the US had very little to gain. The Americans therefore took a non-committal approach to the crisis at first, offering vague statements of support for Israel and urging all parties to show restraint. While fighting a war in Vietnam, the US did not want to be drawn into another war in the Middle East. As Little has argued:

By the spring of 1967 this escalating arms spiral would confront U.S. policymakers with the prospect of being dragged into a full-blown war in the Middle East at a time when the military situation in Southeast Asia was rapidly going from bad to terrible. Should the Johnson administration suddenly find itself bogged down in two wars, there would be hell to pay on Capitol Hill.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 136.

<sup>121</sup> Douglas Little. *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 240.

Despite the US unwillingness to be dragged into the situation, the removal of UNEF from the Sinai caught the US by surprise and when Israel contacted Washington about the possible closure of the Straits of Tiran, the US became more involved. Messages to Egypt became more direct; at first he told Nasser to “set as your first duty . . . this transcendent objective: the avoidance of hostilities.”<sup>122</sup> Upon the closure of the straits, the message was “. . . blocking would be an illegal and destructive act against peace.”<sup>123</sup> Finally, the US informed Egypt that an attack on Israel would be suicide. The US was much less neutral than the USSR and they had much more to lose. Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia warned the US that they faced repercussions for their continued support to Israel and their demands to open the Tiran Straits. The Saudis warned the US to remain neutral and not intervene as a ‘policeman,’ and that if they intervened in the Tiran crisis they would be “finished in the Middle East.”<sup>124</sup> The US came to the conclusion that they had much more to lose than gain by interfering, and any rate believed the Israelis would win any war, regardless of whether or not they struck first. A Top Secret Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) appraisal of the situation (since declassified) stated that:

The Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) are at a numerical disadvantage to the combined strength of its Arab neighbors in terms of aircraft, armor, artillery, naval vessels, and manpower. Nonetheless, the IDF maintain qualitative superiority over the Arab armed forces in almost all aspects of combat operations.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Gluska, 239.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid.*, 240.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 244. The US Ambassador to Egypt told President Johnson that the US would face a heavy cost in the Arab world for supporting Israel. Similarly, the US Ambassador to Syria wrote Washington about his concerns regarding US support for Israel.

<sup>125</sup> [https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no1/html\\_files/arab\\_israeli\\_war\\_1.html](https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol49no1/html_files/arab_israeli_war_1.html)

The report further indicated that Israel could drive Egyptian forces west of the Suez Canal in seven to nine days, and could contain any attacks from Syria and Jordan at the same time.<sup>126</sup> Israel appeared to be alone in its assessment that it could not win a war on three fronts.

This chapter of the paper analyzed the build-up to the Six-Day War from the Arab perspective. Not surprisingly it differed greatly from the Israeli perspective. As detailed in Chapter One, a key element of the spiral model is misunderstanding. This event demonstrates numerous examples of misunderstanding from both sides of the conflict. Jordan was a small player in the conflict, but its participation could have been avoided entirely if Israel had continued its secret meetings with King Hussein and honoured its commitment not to attack Jordan due to the terrorist strikes. *Fatah* strikes were launched from Jordanian territory, but not with the support of Jordan, as Israel had thought. Rather, Syria was the sponsor of *Fatah* and used Jordan and Lebanon as launching points to avoid Israeli reprisal. The raid on Samua was a crucial event in the prelude to the war; had Israel not attacked Samua, Jordan likely would not have joined Egypt in the alliance, creating a third front for Israel and causing the tipping point for the attack of June 5.

Syria, the most hostile of the three Arab states against Israel, openly supported *Fatah* in their cross-border attack on Israel. They were most in favour of a war with Israel, yet the least capable of fighting one. They were an unstable state, suffering numerous coups d'état in the years preceding the war. The coup occurring in the autumn of 1966 brought a hostile, anti-Israel government bent on Israel's destruction. There was no misunderstanding in this case – merely belligerence. Their shelling of Israel's

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<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*

northern flank led to numerous skirmishes, including the large attack of April 7, one that showed Israel the benefits of a large-scale aerial attack. The Syrians counted on Soviet protection and the signing of a mutual defense pact with Egypt to keep them safe in the event of an Israeli attack. What they didn't know is that the states they were counting on for protection did not want a war nearly as much as they did.

Egypt was the most powerful of the Arab states, and was looked to for leadership against Israel. President Nasser was intent on increasing his power and prestige in the Arab world, but not at the cost of a war with Israel. Unfortunately for Nasser he was a victim of his own success. Each move he made was successful, not because it was the right move but because Israel and the superpowers were so intent on avoiding a conflict. The signing of a defense agreement with Syria was intended to keep Syria under control – all it did was make them more belligerent and Israel more worried. The call for the removal of UNEF was a ploy to bluff Israel into not attacking Syria; however the UN immediately complied, forcing Nasser's hand further. Nasser attempted to keep the small UNEF contingent near the Straits of Tiran by omitting it from the withdrawal request, but the UN removed all of UNEF, putting the straits in play. If Egypt had truly wanted a war with Israel it had plenty of opportunity to start one. This chapter has shown that no one in the region wanted a war, yet all seemed both capable and intent on inciting one.

The USSR and the US had numerous opportunities to step in and stop a conflict, yet like Nasser were more intent on building influence and prestige in the region. At first, the USSR appeared hostile to Israel, and then became more conciliatory, warning both sides to avoid conflict. The US was more one-sided, engaging more with Israel than with the Arabs. When persuasion didn't work with Egypt, the US tried threats. They



didn't want a war in the region, yet gave their tacit approval at the eleventh hour. Their own self-interests dictated that they were better served staying out of the conflict.

The next chapter will analyze both perspectives using the spiral model as a framework to determine whether this conflict was pre-emptive and whether it was justified under Just War Theory.

#### **CHAPTER FOUR: WAS THE SIX-DAY WAR PRE-EMPTIVE AND JUSTIFIED?**

This paper has defined Just War Theory and the spiral model, and has seen the build-up to the Six-Day War from the perspectives of both sides. This chapter will take the evidence presented and decide whether the attack by Israel on June 5 was a justified and pre-emptive attack.

##### **Was it Pre-Emptive?**

Recall that pre-emptive war is used by a state when it fears an attack in the near term and will likely suffer defeat, therefore it is a short-term strategy motivated by fear and the need to have a military advantage by striking first. Whether or not the attack will take place and whether or not the state will suffer defeat are both based on perception. In this case, Israel felt that it could not wait for an Arab strike, as it would result in the destruction of the state itself. Indeed, waiting increased the existential nature of the threat. This opinion was not shared by the US or the USSR, who believed that Israel would triumph over any Arab coalition, regardless of who launched the first strike. The

CIA report mentioned in chapter three showed the US intelligence agency believed that Israel could have easily defeated its Arab neighbours in a matter of days. A state initiates pre-emptive conflict if it fears an imminent attack by another state that would cause serious harm.<sup>127</sup> A potential aggressor state may have threatened an attack, moved their forces into a position to attack, or recently attacked. The decision to conduct a pre-emptive strike is driven by a combination of perceived intent and enemy capabilities. Since intent is difficult to prove with any certainty, a state must rely on the capabilities of the aggressor state in order to determine a course of action. Notwithstanding the opinions of the superpowers, Israel believed it was under an existential threat from the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan. Egyptian forces had been moved to the Israeli border in the Sinai Peninsula, and President Nasser had made increasingly bold statements regarding the annihilation of Israel. The Egyptian forces in the Sinai were not front-line troops; they were second- and third-line troops, as nearly half of Egypt's military was deployed in Yemen.<sup>128</sup> Syria's military, though equipped with military equipment provided by the USSR, was clearly no match for the Israeli military on its own. Skirmishes that broke out between Israel and Syria were quickly and decisively won by Israel. Jordan's military was small and also posed no threat to Israel on its own. It is important to note, though, that Israel was not thinking of each Arab state in isolation. It was looking at a potential three-front war with possible involvement by the USSR.

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<sup>127</sup> Walzer, 85. Walzer argues that a state may use military force if failure to do so would seriously risk their territorial integrity or political independence.

<sup>128</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010. Also see Oren, 59; Hammel, 140; and Bowen, 39.

General Yitzhak Rabin's assessment to the Knesset on May 23 illustrated his four concerns:

1. War, if it broke out, would be conducted on two fronts, and possibly a third (Jordan).
2. Israel would have to act alone and it would be a war for life or death, a struggle that would determine whether or not Israel would continue to exist.
3. The main problem was not the Arabs, but the Soviets and what they would do.
4. The settlements in the North would inevitably endure heavy Syrian bombardment. "From the military viewpoint, the IDF can wait at least another 48 hours."<sup>129</sup>

The Israeli view was that it was faced with a life or death struggle, and that they needed to act in the short term in order to maintain an advantage. The US and USSR felt Israel would win regardless of who struck first; those kind of assessments are easy when your state is not the one under threat of attack. Israel did not know that it faced three inferior armies and three states who did not desire conflict. It did not know that the USSR had no intention of intervening. It only knew that three states that had openly called for the annihilation of Israel had signed a mutual-defence treaty and were mobilizing their militaries. Evans describes Israel's attack as pre-emptive in *Just War Theory*:

Egypt and Syria had mobilised, closed the Straits of Tiran and had a history of harsh and threatening rhetoric towards Israel. Israelis believed that unless their country mobilised its reserves, it could not match Arab power. Israel could not have relied of a defensive strategy of waiting until struck because an Arab offensive would be devastating. And, Israelis believed, if they had not struck first, the coming Arab offensive could have been the end of the Israeli state.<sup>130</sup>

Flynn also defines Israel's attack as pre-emptive in *First Strike*:

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<sup>129</sup> Shaul Shay from Ro'i and Morozov, 128.

<sup>130</sup> Neta C Crawford from Evans, 28.

The odds were simply too great. Since the Arab states appeared to be acting in unprecedented unity, sharing the common purpose of destroying the Jewish state, Israel could not expect to fragment the opposition. It would have to attack on one front and then another. Preemption offered this opportunity and represented the only course of action.<sup>131</sup>

Based on the information Israel had at the time – the rhetoric, the mobilization of three armies against it (armies that had signed a mutual defence pact), and the decisive numerical advantage those armies held over Israel – Israel believed that it faced an imminent threat in *both* the legal and temporal sense. Therefore, the attack launched on June 5, 1967 can be classified as a pre-emptive strike.<sup>132</sup>

### **The Spiral Model Effect**

Jervis's Spiral Model is based on misunderstanding. The Arab-Israeli conflict is rooted in misunderstanding, and moves made by each side in the build up to the Six-Day War were misconstrued by the other side. When Egypt placed its military on alert on May 15, Israel excluded tanks from its Independence Day parade as a conciliatory move. Rather than having a calming effect as intended, the move was seen by Egypt as proof of an Israeli military build-up on the Sinai border.<sup>133</sup> Syria felt that the UN was ignoring its complaints of Israeli military activity on its border; therefore it decided to meet force with force. This only caused Israel to use more military force against Syria, which

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<sup>131</sup> Flynn, 194.

<sup>132</sup> Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010. Dr Chennoufi also believes that if Egypt had struck first, it could also have been classified as a pre-emptive strike given the mobilization of Israel's reserves and the information given by the USSR on the Israeli plan to invade Syria (information that proved to be a ploy by the USSR).

<sup>133</sup> Hammel, 30.

caused Syria to look to Egypt for a mutual defence pact, which caused Israel to fear a multi-front war. The signing of the defence pact, seen as a dire threat by Israel, was in fact a measure President Nasser took to try and control the Syrians and diffuse the building situation:

The unfettered radicalism of Syrian foreign policy was of such concern to the Soviet Union that they prodded Egypt into securing a defense pact with Syria in late 1966. The collective defense pact was designed to bolster the security of the vulnerable Syrian regime, while also in theory facilitating Nasser's ability to constrain the Syrian regime in its foreign policy adventurism toward Israel.<sup>134</sup>

Again, a move by one side, intended to help the other, is misconstrued as a greater threat. These actions and reactions are a classic example of the Spiral Model. The clearest example was the tipping point on the path to war. The PLO raid into Israel resulted in a large-scale retaliation by the IDF against the village of Samua. This retaliation, arguably a disproportionate one, was one reason why King Hussein of Jordan decided to sign the mutual defence pact with Egypt, a move it had long resisted. Another reason was the King's view that war was by then inevitable, and would include Jordan anyway:

At the time of the Cairo meeting, I was convinced that Nasser did not want war. But he had no choice, for the determining factor was Tel Aviv's threat against Syria who, as we know, was bound to Egypt by that bilateral defense pact.<sup>135</sup>

Both sides misunderstood each other's actions at every turn. This move by Jordan was seen by Israel as the final reason to resort to pre-emptive attack, yet it had helped cause

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<sup>134</sup> Greg Cashman and Leonard C. Robinson. *An Introduction to the Causes of War: Patterns of Interstate Conflict from World War I to Iraq*. (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 2007), 180.

<sup>135</sup> King Hussein from Vance and Lauer, 48.

the move by its actions in Samua. The inability of either side to see the viewpoint of the other is why the Spiral Model so definitively describes the build-up to this conflict.

### **Was it a *Justified Pre-Emptive Strike*?**

Recall that *Jus Ad Bellum* requires that several conditions be met by the state advocating or commencing conflict, pre-emptive or otherwise. This section of the paper will review each of the conditions and provide evidence to support Israel's use of force.

Proving just cause to everyone is impossible. A state may have the approval of its allies and friends, but to the state being attacked, or its allies, the cause will never be viewed as just. In this case, based on the evidence Israel had at the time, the cause was just. Israel was surrounded by hostile (or what appeared at the time to be hostile) forces. Egypt had requested the removal of the UNEF from the Sinai peninsula and blockaded the Straits of Tiran; Syria had grown increasingly belligerent, had routinely shelled settlements in the north of Israel, and had challenged Israel's air force by launching fighters on April 7; and Jordan signed the mutual defence pact with Egypt and Syria, which opened a possible third front for Israel in a conflict. After each provocative step, Israel attempted to find a diplomatic solution to the situation, pleading with the US to help find a way out of a conflict with its neighbours. The US, mired in a conflict of its own in Vietnam, could offer only token support, and but in the end provided tacit approval.<sup>136</sup> By the beginning of June, Israel had run out of options:

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<sup>136</sup> See chapter two, footnote 77 from Bowen.

In 1967, Israel faced an unprecedented threat to its security. Surrounded on all sides by hostile foes, defending a state that was too small to give ground and mount a defense in depth, its geographic vulnerability underscored its untenable strategic position.<sup>137</sup>

Pre-emptive self-defence is based on the threat of imminent attack. Justified pre-emptive attack must also take *Jus Ad Bellum* into account; that is that not only is the cause for pre-emptive attack valid, but that the authority to go to war is legal (i.e. declared by competent authority within the state) and that all diplomatic avenues have been exhausted prior to any conflict. All signs pointed to an imminent attack on three fronts against Israel. Time and geography both played a factor in Israel deciding whether it should attack pre-emptively or continue to work for a diplomatic solution. The rhetoric from Egypt and Syria and the movement of Egyptian troops into the Sinai after Egypt asked the UNEF gave Israel sufficient reason to mobilize its forces, but did not yet constitute a sufficient threat to justify an attack. Even the closure of the Straits of Tiran, previously described by Israel as a *Casus Belli*, did not push Israel to attack pre-emptively. Prime Minister Eshkol still felt there was room to solve the crisis diplomatically, as until a ship was actually prevented from entering the straits towards Israel, there was no actual blockade in place. Jordan's decision to join the mutual defence pact proved to be the final straw for Israel's leaders. The irony is that the IDF raid by Israel was one reason Jordan joined the pact. Nevertheless, the reality was that Israel was now surrounded:

Dire threats and warlike appearances do not in themselves constitute a war. It is known now that Egypt, by far the strongest of the Arab confrontation states, was not ready nor even particularly willing to go to war against Israel. Not just yet. But in late May 1967, Israel's political and military leaders did not know that, and they certainly could not act on such an assumption. It is an ironclad rule of war – the

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<sup>137</sup> Flynn, 194.

*first* rule of war – that an enemy must be judged on the basis of his capabilities, and not on the basis of his intentions. By June 1, 1967, Syria, Egypt, and even Jordan were *capable* of launching a three-front war against Israel at a moment's notice, so Israel had to assume they would.<sup>138</sup>

With the benefit of hindsight, it is possible to see that Israel did not face the existential threat it thought it faced in June 1967. The move by President Nasser to request the removal of the UNEF was a bluff; he hoped the UNEF would delay or only partially withdraw from the Sinai, and was done only to stop Israel from attacking Syria. Due to the careful wording of the Egyptian request, Nasser felt that the UNEF would remain in the key areas adjacent to the Straits of Tiran, a flashpoint from the 1956 Sinai war. Neither move resulted in conflict, and the resultant praise Nasser received in the Arab world only made him bolder. The mutual defence pact with Syria was signed to keep Syria in check, not to threaten Israel. This fact was lost on Syria, causing them to become more belligerent. Jordan's signing of the defence pact was due to internal and pan-Arab politics, not as a threatening signal to Israel, yet it was interpreted as the potential third front and final straw in the Knesset.

The superpowers played a key role in the ongoing development and misunderstanding of the situation as well. The USSR stood to gain from increased tension with arms sales to Egypt and Syria, and the US could not afford to get involved due to Vietnam and for fear of backlash from the Middle East. Neither superpower wanted the situation to spiral into a larger conflict, yet neither was willing to definitively step in and stop the situation from escalating into a war.

All of this is known with the benefit of hindsight. At the time, none of the parties were able to comprehend why the situation spiralled out of control. Israel, the Arab

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<sup>138</sup> Hammel, 39.



countries, and the superpowers were all protecting their own interests. The misunderstanding of every action and reaction, key to the Spiral Model, resulted in the attack of 5 June. Based on the information Israel had at the time – the deployment of the Egyptian Army into the Sinai, the hostile statements made by Egypt and Syria, the closure of the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, and the signing of a mutual defence pact by three of Israel's neighbours - all put Israel in an impossible situation. Diplomacy had been tried and failed. The superpowers were not willing to definitively step in and guarantee Israel's security; therefore Israel had to act alone. Given the information available at the time, Israel's attack on Egypt, Syria, and Jordan on 5 June can be declared a justified pre-emptive attack in accordance with Just War Theory.

This fourth and final chapter has taken all of the evidence presented in chapters two and three and analyzed it using the tenets of Just War Theory and pre-emptive war. Whether or not Israel had just cause can only be based upon the information it had at the time. Using hindsight it is easy to see that the situation was not as dire as Israel thought. Their military was vastly superior to their neighbours combined forces, regardless of the imbalance of men and materiel. Israel had a well-trained, professional army, and it faced a poorly-trained and –equipped Egyptian force in the Sinai (almost half of Egypt's army was deployed in Yemen), a poorly-trained and –equipped army in Syria, and a well-trained but very small army in Jordan. Intelligence gathering was not as advanced as it is today. Israel knew only that it faced the possibility of a three-front war with no help from the US. The misunderstanding of every move by both sides only made war more and more inevitable.

## CONCLUSION

The 1967 Arab-Israeli War grew out of a series of actions and misunderstandings between the combatants; misunderstandings that became more dangerous due to the inability or unwillingness to understand the other side's viewpoint. Israel launched its attack based on the belief that it faced an existential threat from the combined armies of its three neighbours. Article 51 of the UN Charter allows a state to use armed force in self-defence, and JWT and international law similarly allow states to attack pre-emptively if that state believes that it faces an imminent threat of a devastating attack. However, whether or not a state can justifiably and legally attack another state pre-emptively is based upon whether the state under threat can prove the threat is imminent and would result in catastrophic damage to the state, and also that all other avenues to avoid conflict have been exhausted. The attacking state must also ensure any pre-emptive action is proportional to the threat.

The first chapter examined the *Jus Ad Bellum* portion of Just War Theory and the concept of pre-emptive war within international law, and selected the spiral model as the applicable framework to study the conflict. Just War Theory was described as a philosophical and religious doctrine that influenced (and has been influenced by) international law, that guides the justified use of force by states. It continues to be in use today, and is the subject of much study and debate. Many of the authors and sources for this paper frame their research and publications in Just War Theory, and Article 51 of the United Nations charter and its acceptance of state self defence as a reason for war is rooted within Just War Theory.

The legitimacy of pre-emptive war was defined by whether a state faces an imminent threat based upon another party's stated intentions and its ability to follow through on those intentions. A state calling for the destruction of another state and then massing its troops along the border could be construed as a legitimate threat. Whether or not the threat was immediate would depend on the type of forces massed on the border and the ability of that force to inflict catastrophic damage. An aggressive state calling for the destruction of another state with no associated ability to carry out the threat could not be seen as an imminent threat at all. The contemporary example of Iran's repeated calls for the elimination or destruction of Israel with no associated troop deployment was used to define this type of scenario.

Robert Jervis's spiral model describes how such misunderstandings lead to conflict. The similar history of these states is blurred by vastly different interpretations of that history, and the inability of both sides to see or understand the reasoning behind the other side's actions quickly turned an uncertain situation into a very dangerous one. This conflict grew out of misunderstanding, specifically through a lack of communication. The absence of communication and dialogue can only lead to further misunderstanding and lead states closer to conflict, proving the very essence of Jervis's spiral model. Jervis's other theory, the offense-defense balance, states that wars are more likely when one state has a perceived advantage over another – their offense is stronger than the others' defense. This war could also be examined through the lens of the offense-defense balance, however for the purpose of this paper, the duelling narratives and associated misunderstandings inherent in the situation automatically lend themselves to analysis based on the spiral model.

Chapter two of the paper analyzed the build-up to the Six-Day War from the Israeli perspective, including its relations with its Arab neighbours, its alliance with the US, and its diplomatic interactions with the USSR in the days and months leading up to the conflict. This chapter discussed whether the diplomatic and military environment in the Middle East in the first few months of 1967 made war inevitable or whether Israel misread the actions and intentions of its neighbours. Raids into Israel by organizations branded as terrorists by Israel and supported as resistance fighters by Syria; mutual defense pacts between Egypt, Syria, and Jordan; the removal of UN peacekeepers from the Sinai at Egypt's request and resultant Egyptian troop movements; and finally the closure of the Straits of Tiran by Egypt were seen by Israel as provocative and threatening. Seeming indifference from the US and veiled threats for the USSR also weighed heavily on Israel's decision whether to wage war.

Chapter three of the paper analyzed the same situation from the Arab perspective. Syria believed that Israel received preferential treatment at the UN. Repeated attacks by Israel against Syria were ignored by the UN, causing Syria to become more aggressive and meet Israeli military force with its own. It also supported Al Fatah in their raids against Israel, seeing Al Fatah as a proxy through whom they could attack the Jewish state while avoiding direct military confrontation, something they were ill-equipped to do. Jordan was not belligerent towards Israel like Syria and Egypt were, and in fact had been trying to curb the raids against Israel by Al Fatah from within their territory. Nevertheless, an Israeli raid into a Jordanian village, seen as a disproportionate retaliation for a raid Jordan did not support, was one reason why Jordan signed the mutual defense pact with Egypt. From the Jordanian perspective it was Israel's actions that contributed

to the outbreak of hostilities, not Arab ones. The pact was a non-binding one and limited defence cooperation to advisors, but was seen as a necessary step to curb Israeli aggression. Next, the actions and words of President Nasser of Egypt were discussed. Many of his words and actions were threats or bluffs, used to strengthen his position in the Arab world. His alliance with Syria was a move intended to curb Syrian aggression, yet it managed only to embolden them. Egypt's military was mired in a war with Yemen and the forces deployed to the Sinai were no real threat to Israel. Unfortunately, Israel could only base their actions on the fact that Egypt had deployed thousands of troops to their border and Egypt's president was calling for their destruction. Finally the actions of the US and USSR were examined, demonstrating that they both had many opportunities to intervene before hostilities started, yet they did not or could not due to their own situations or plans for the Middle East. The US was bogged down in Vietnam and could not afford another war, neither militarily or politically. Open support threatened to destroy their relationship with moderate Arab states; therefore the Americans tried quiet, backdoor diplomacy with little to no effect. The USSR did not want a war in the Middle East either, but they had more to gain from the building tension. Tension meant arms sales, and limited conflict gave them the opportunity to see US influence in the region diminish.

The fourth chapter of the paper used the pre-emptive war framework and the evidence from chapters two and three to determine that Israel's attack was in fact pre-emptive. Using the JWT framework and the LOAC, the attack was also justified under international law. As stated at the beginning of this paper, the Israeli attack launched on June 5, 1967 against Egypt, Syria, and Jordan was one of the most lopsided military

victories in history. This paper proved that based on the information available to Israel in 1967, it faced the imminent threat of a devastating attack from the combined forces of Egypt, Syria, and Jordan, and its attack was a justified pre-emptive one, within the boundaries of Just War Theory and international law.

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### **Miscellaneous**

Conversation with Dr Miloud Chennoufi, Wednesday, February 17, 2010.