

# Six-Day War - 1967

The Six-Day War of 1967 was a brief but decisive conflict in which Israel fought and defeated the armies of Syria, Jordan and Egypt. The territories previously held by the three Arab countries would fall to Israel, forever altering the geopolitical scenario of the Middle-East.

This article will further elaborate upon the events of the Six-Day war within the context of the UPSC Mains Exam.

## Background of the Six-Day War

The Six-Day war was the third large-scale military confrontation between Israel and the Arab states which in turn was a result of the political tension that had existed for decades following the founding of Israel in 1948.

Due to the territorial disputes that happened during the birth of Israel in 1948, a coalition of Arab nations invaded the nascent Jewish state, leading to the outbreak of the First Arab Israeli War. The invasion failed but Israel lost territories to Jordan (West Bank), Egypt (Gaza Strip) and Syria (Golan Heights)

The second major conflict was during the Suez Crisis of 1966-67 when Israel, with direct support from the United Kingdom and France, invaded Egypt in response to the nationalization of the Suez Canal. It was only the heavy pressure of the United States that forced Israel to withdraw from the Suez region in 1967.

There was a period of relative calm during the late 1950s and early 1960s but it was only a calm before the coming storm. Arab leaders were not happy at the status-quo at the moment and sought to even the odds with further military operations against Israel.

## The escalation in Middle-East tensions

A series of border disputes between Israel and the Arab nations was the fuse that lit the powder-keg of the Six-Day War. Palestinian Guerillas, with Syrian backing, had conducted raids on Israeli settlements across the border. This had naturally evoked furious response from the Israeli Army.

Following an air skirmish between Israel and Syria in April 1967, Soviet intelligence had indicated the movement of Israeli troops towards the Syrian border. Although the reports were proven false later on it goaded Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser into action in support of his Syrian ally. To this end, Nasser sent troops into the Sinai, expelling a United Nations peacekeeping force stationed there.

In addition, he banned Israeli shipping from the Straits of Tiran, which was a vital maritime route for Israel as it connected the Red Sea with the Gulf of Aqaba. Nasser also signed a defence pact with Jordan.

In order to de-escalate tensions between the Israelis and the Arabs, the international community implored both sides to restrain from starting a conflict and reopen the Straits of Tiran. It did little to deviate Nasser from his present course. Left with no alternative, Israel leaders voted in June to counter the growing Arab buildup with a preemptive strike of their own.

## The outbreak of the Six-Day War

The Israeli Defence Force coordinated a massive aerial attack on Egypt on June 5, 1967. About 200 aircraft took off from airfields from Israel and swooped down on Egypt from the north, catching the Egyptian army by complete surprise. In the ensuing assault, roughly 90 percent of the Egyptian air force was destroyed on the ground. Similar operations were conducted against the air forces of Jordan and Syria with similar results

By the end of June 5, the Israeli air force had won full control of the skies over the Middle East

With the victory in the air complete, the ground war began the same day on June 5. With the support of the air force, the Israeli army poured across the Egyptian border into the Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

Despite a spirited defence put up by the Egyptian Army, the battle in the Sinai proved to be disastrous for Egypt as several casualties inflicted upon them rendered their position untenable and they were forced to retreat.

The operation against the Jordanians began with an artillery bombardment by them on Israeli positions in Jerusalem. The Jordanians had begun the bombardment following misguided reports of an Egyptian victory. The Israelis began a counterattack which led to the capture of the West Bank and East Jerusalem on June 7. It was celebrated by Israeli troops with a prayer held at the Wailing Wall, one of the holiest sites Judaism

The final confrontation of the Six-Day war was the offensive against the Syrian-held Golan Heights on the northeastern border of Israel. Beginning on June 9, Israeli tanks and infantry converged on the Golan Heights followed by aerial support. The Golan Heights fell to the Israeli Army on June 10, 1967.

A ceasefire brokered by the United Nations took effect on June 10, 1967, ending the Six-Day War.

## The aftermath of the Six-Day War

The speed and the ease at which the Israelis had won the war stunned the Arab states. President Nasser resigned in disgrace but he came back to power when the Egyptian people showed him support with street demonstrations.

The mood in Israel was that of jubilation that having captured the Gaza Strip from Egypt, Golan Heights from Syria and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan. The capture of East Jerusalem was symbolic in nature because now Jews could pray at the holy site of the western wall without any problems.

But the victory at the Six-Day war lent an air of overconfidence within the rank of the Israeli Defence Force, which would prove disastrous during the Yom-Kippur war that would break out in 1973.

Yet, the victory of the Six-Day war only served to fuel further Arab-Israeli conflicts. The Khartoum Resolution, adopted by the Arab states in August 1967 which promised “no peace, no recognition and no negotiation with Israel”

The settlement of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip brought about one million Palestinian Arabs under direct Israeli rule. Thousands would flee in the following years already worsening a burgeoning refugee crisis that has continued to this day.

The Sinai Peninsula was returned to Egypt in 1982 while the Israeli army withdrew from Gaza in 2005. The Golan Heights and the West Bank are still under Israeli administration, which has proved to be a major roadblock in any peace negotiation between Israel and the Arab world.