

The Hidden Hand & The Six Day War

During six momentous days in June 1967, Jews in Eretz Yisrael went from the pit of despair to the summit of celebration; from fears of a second Holocaust to obliteration of their tormentors; from the brink of annihilation to reunification of Yerushalayim.

In six days, Israel feverishly felled her enemies, tripled her land, recaptured control of the Old City and Temple Mount—and on the seventh day rested. It sounded too Biblical to be true—but it was.

Without exaggeration, the Six Day War created a new reality in the Middle East—in the world. The victory, however, carried in its wake potentially ominous repercussions—politically, societally and religiously—repercussions that still reverberate today.

June 5, 1967. 7:30 AM.

Avihu Bin-Nun, captain of a formation of Israeli fighters, noted how clear the skies were. And the wind was close to zero. Conditions were perfect for attack.

His squadron was one of dozens from various Israeli air bases, more than 250 warplanes in all. Most had turned west after leaving Israeli airspace to rendezvous in silence over the Mediterranean Sea, before banking back in the direction of Egypt. Others were racing down the Red Sea toward targets deep in the Egyptian interior. All told, their mission was to hit over 11 enemy airbases in the Egyptian-occupied Sinai desert and elsewhere.

Major Yaalon Shavit peered through the glass of his cockpit, flying faster than the speed of sound and so close to the water that he could almost touch it. As he did so, he recalled the words of his commander: “No radio communication! Nothing! Silence! Total silence! Even in the event of mechanical trouble, no calls for assistance! Just crash into the sea!”

Watching the waters pass below at “a crazy speed,” his finely-honed pilot senses were firing on all cylinders. Every muscle stretched in total concentration. He dared not even look to the side for an instant. There was nothing in his world beside the horizon. If he lost it even momentarily, he could find himself in the water.

Some warplanes flew as low as six feet above the waves to avoid detection by Egypt’s numerous radar sites. And not only Egyptian radar. The Israelis were more worried about the Soviet radar and naval vessels in the area keeping a close watch on the situation. Soviet warships in the Mediterranean had a direct link with the Egyptian Command headquarters and would pass information from their radar to the Egyptians inside 10 minutes.

Meanwhile, back in Israel, the man in charge of the preemptive airstrike, Major General Mordechai “Motty” Hod, was “sweating and guzzling pitchers of water like a giant radiator,” one observer noted. Hod knew how to handle nerve-racking situations. He had smuggled Holocaust survivors into Palestine



Israeli (French-built) Mirage fighters.



Israeli Mirage jets flying above the Israeli-Egyptian border on June 5, 1967, the first day of the Six Day War.

after World War II, and even smuggled in a British Spitfire as well! However, the stress of this mission—*Mivtza Moked* (Operation Focus)—was unbearable even for him. He later recounted how the first half hour “felt like a day.”

Unbeknown to him, he had even more reason to be nervous. His worst nightmare had come true. At 7:15 Israel time, as his squadrons rendezvoused over the Mediterranean to strike Egyptian airbases, they had been detected by enemy radar!

Cold War Comes to the Middle East

It had all started three weeks earlier with a lie—a Russian lie.

On May 13, 1967, the Soviet government passed along to Egypt information

about a large Israeli troop concentration on the Syrian border. Over the following two weeks, the Russians sent the Egyptians more detailed information indicating that an Israeli force of up to 11 brigades was involved.

At the time, the Israelis had no more than a company (120 men) in this particular area. The United Nations, which had observation posts along the Israeli-Syrian border, confirmed that they had no evidence of the alleged troop movements. The Israelis desperately tried to disprove the charge three times by inviting the Soviet ambassador in Israel to visit the front. He refused each time.

Though the precise reason behind the Soviet lie remains obscure to this day, it can be understood in the context of an event 13 years earlier. In 1954, six years after the Soviets had voted in favor of the creation of the State of Israel, they switched allegiance to the Arabs. They saw in the Arabs a proxy they could manipulate in the Cold War against the United States.

Beginning in 1956, the Soviets invested massively in the Middle East, about \$2 billion in military aid alone—1,700 tanks, 2,400 artillery pieces, 500 jets, and 1,400 advisors. Above everyone else, the Kremlin saw the potential of a useful puppet—er, partner—in the President of Egypt, Gamal Abdul Nasser.

Nasser, for his part, saw himself as the savior of the Arab peoples. He desired to turn the entire Middle East into one Arab nation under his dominion. He was only too happy to entertain offers by the Soviet Union to sell him arms and make him the regional powerhouse.

The Soviets, though, would never let him forget who was in charge. The story goes that when Nasser visited Moscow, then-Prime Minister Nikita Khrushchev strongly suggested that Nasser free some Egyptian communists that Nasser had imprisoned. The discussion became deadlocked; the atmosphere grew heavy and strained. Then, Khrushchev said: “Suppose we let this ride for the time being and take up some non-controversial issues.”

“Go ahead,” Nasser replied.

“I’d like to tell you about some data from the central statistical bureau of the Soviet Union,” Khrushchev said. “It might interest you.”

“Please do.”

“My statisticians tell me that among the three million Jews living in the Soviet Union, about a half a million are of military age, and those include several thousand trained flight engineers and pilots, several thousand weapons and armored car experts, a few thousand military engineers, several thousand military doctors, several hundred rocket experts and capable nuclear scientists, several thousand...”



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Beginning in 1956, the Soviets invested massively in the Middle East, especially Egypt. Shown: Soviet-made TU-16 Bombers, primary bomber of the Egyptian Air Force. Egypt planned to use these to bomb Israeli civilian centers, particularly Tel Aviv.