



## The Six-Day War Was a One-Time Event

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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:** The overwhelming victory of the 1967 Six-Day War is sometimes used by proponents of an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank as proof that Israel can defend itself from behind the “green line.” They argue that Israel won the 1967 conflict from behind the pre-1967 borders, and is therefore capable of doing so again, and from the same lines, if necessary. This, they claim, clears the path to a withdrawal. However, this argument ignores all the military-strategic changes that have washed over the region in the fifty years since that conflict. It fails to take into account that the Six-Day War was a one-time event, with unique circumstances that will not be seen again.

In many ways, the 1967 war was a “secondary tremor” from the tectonic earthquake of WWII. It used many of the same doctrines and tactics, and the same, or similar, military platforms (the main exception being fighter jets that replaced propeller air force planes).

Many of the ground platforms were the same in both wars, including Sherman, US-made tanks used by Israel, and Soviet-made T-34 tanks used by Syria and Egypt. The artillery guns were also quite similar in both wars, as were the fighting techniques.

In 1964, three years before the outbreak of hostilities, Soviet military weapons systems and doctrines were being imported into Egypt and Syria in large quantities.

Senior Israeli generals – the head of the IDF Doctrine Department, Maj.-Gen. Zvi Zamir (who would become the next head of the Mossad), and Maj.-Gen. Yisrael Tal, commander of the Armored Corps – flew to Germany to learn about WWII doctrines.

They also spoke to German commanders in order to learn how to attack Soviet-style defensive lines.

They took off-the-shelf doctrines, like Germany's WWII Blitzkrieg doctrine, and adopted them to the Israel Defense Force's (IDF) needs in the best possible manner.

In the 1960s, wars in the Middle East occurred mainly in open areas, with military machines moving across such battle zones. The IDF utilized the dynamics of the surprise attack and the move-and-fire tactic, borrowing from the Blitzkrieg doctrine.

The Israel Air Force's (IAF) surprise attacks on the air forces of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and, later, Iraq, were the result of deep and comprehensive planning that began shortly after the end of the 1956 Suez Campaign. In a way, it was inspired by Luftwaffe ideas. The IAF brought this doctrine to optimal usage in the Six-Day War.

This feat was never repeated because in subsequent years, the surrounding states hid their jets in well-protected, underground hangars. Those hangars, which created a passive defense, were reinforced by active surface-to-air missile systems and anti-aircraft guns.

On the Arab side during the Six-Day War, the Syrians and Egyptians modeled their forces on the fronts on Soviet defensive doctrines, following them very closely, while the Jordanians operated according to British doctrine.

The successful Israeli air campaign set the scene for events on land. On the southern front with Egypt, the IDF entered Sinai on the morning of June 5, the first day of the war. Egypt quickly began withdrawing on the morning of June 6, as it lacked air cover, which was the main defense for ground forces. The order from Cairo was to retreat as quickly as possible. From day two, the IDF went from attack mode to advance and pursuit operations.

On the northern front, Syria too lacked air power after the Israeli air campaign knocked out its air force. Syria realized, after four days, that it was alone, with Egypt and Jordan losing their combat capabilities. Syria placed its defensive positions too far forward and did not place sufficient back-up armored units to carry out the Soviet counter-strike doctrine.

Had Syria placed more armored units on the second echelon line, as a force ready to be used at the right moment in the service of counterstrikes, the IDF would not have been able hold the Golan Heights.

The collapse of the Syrian defensive lines in the northern Golan forced the Syrians in the southern Golan to withdraw. This success was immediately exploited by IDF airborne troops, which captured the south of the Golan.

On the eastern front, the battle for Jerusalem lasted 27 hours. When it ended, IDF paratroopers and armored units were in control of the city.

The Jordanian defensive system was hastily created, relying on Infantry Brigade 3, which defended Jerusalem. That brigade was defeated on the ground by the IDF's Paratrooper Brigade and a lightning assault by the IDF's Armored Brigade 10. Jordan's Brigade 2, which defended northern Jerusalem, was also defeated by the advancing IDF assault.

Jordan's armored Brigade 60 set out from Jericho towards Jerusalem, but was struck from the air by Israel on the road between the Dead Sea and Jerusalem.

In the northern West Bank, Jordan's King Hussein, when he realized the situation, ordered his "crown jewel" unit, Brigade 40, to withdraw, in order to remain with a military force to defend Jordan.

None of these events can be repeated. Warfare has shifted from open areas to urban settings. Even in Jerusalem, in 1967, Jordanian military positions were positioned mainly out in the open – like, for example, the Jordanian company stationed on Ammunition Hill, which was separated from civilian zones.

In post-modern warfare, military units must conduct street-to-street fighting, often without knowing where the enemy is located. This means the whole idea of encircling an area and besieging it while knocking out the enemy's centers of gravity – tactics that were so successful in 1967 – are no longer relevant today.

In 2017, the enemy's systems are decentralized. One need look no further than Hezbollah in Lebanon to see this. Hezbollah possesses a deep understanding of the IDF's advantages, and seeks to cancel them out. It lacks F-35 jets, submarines, and tanks, but seeks to equalize the playing field with Israel with its own unique concepts.

Hezbollah does this by stocking up on rockets with a variety of ranges. Quantity is what counts in this type of approach. Hezbollah has over 100,000 projectiles. Even if 80% miss their targets or are destroyed, 20,000 enemy rocket attacks remains a substantial threat.

Hezbollah has also set up bases of operation in hilly Lebanese areas, dubbed "nature reserves." These tactics cancel out Israel's ability to conduct a rapid lightning assault. In war under these circumstances, a new battle develops every moment. Every village under enemy control represents a new battlefield.

The latest tactic being used by both Hezbollah and Hamas is to set up elite forces designed to take the fight into Israeli territory. Hamas has the Nuhba force to this end, and Hezbollah's Redwan unit was set up for this objective.

These types of threats mean Israel has to allocate more resources to defense. Israel's aerial supremacy still goes a long way, but it cannot be described as decisive in modern warfare.

Twenty-first century enemies operate underground, in tunnels and bunkers. Their zones are interlinked with that of civilians, meaning that even if Israel gets excellent intelligence, it can't always act on it, for fear of creating enormous collateral damage. Killing thousands of civilians in a few strikes would immediately lead to Israel's delegitimization.

In 1967, Israel's enemies made all mistakes possible. Israel's modern-day enemies will not do that again.

Contemporary warfare is based on local fighters. Some of them are civilians, as seen on Syrian and Ukrainian battlegrounds.

Hamas has built up localized divisions and brigades whose commanders live in the areas in which they operate.

In the Six-Day War, the Egyptian soldiers mobilized to Gaza and Sinai were expeditionary forces. When the battles ended, they went home to Egyptian cities far from the conflict zones. In Gaza, when battles end, commanders hide their weapons at home and act like local civilian residents. They live among the people.

When one fights locals, the dynamics of post-conflict situations change. Occupying territory and hoisting a flag mean very different things in 1967 and 2017.

In the Six-Day War, Israel had the ability to get to Nablus and stay there. Today, if Israel leaves the central regions in Area C of the West Bank and Palestinian terrorists begin firing rockets at Israel from those areas, the IDF would return, but it would take years to reestablish effective access to Palestinian urban centers, not six days. This access is what allows Israel to keep terrorism in check today.

As of now, when the IDF wishes to target a bomb-making lab in Nablus, it can launch a raid from a nearby location without the necessity of receiving air support or armored units. This can be done with light forces traveling in a few armored jeeps. In the event of an Israeli withdrawal from Area C, a division-wide operation would be needed to achieve the same objective.

One need look no further than Gaza, which Israel left in 2005, to see that today, only major firepower and an entire operation enable the IDF to reenter territory from which it has withdrawn.

If Israel leaves the West Bank, it will turn into Gaza. The possibility of nightly security raids – essential for Israel's security – will disappear.

These fundamental changes mean defending Israel from the pre-1967 borders is no longer possible.

In addition, the character of the enemy and its motivation have been transformed. Israel has placed its faith in technological advantages. Its enemies have become religious.

Because of these changes, the lessons of the 1967 War are not applicable to 2017. They should not be seen as such.

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