

## “The Temple Mount is in Our Hands”

This June marks the 40th anniversary of the Six-Day War, a seminal event in the history of the Jewish people, the state of Israel and the entire Middle East.

After a lengthy period of provocation, Egypt closed the Straits of Tiran on May 23, 1967 – an act of war under international law. Four days later, Egyptian Leader Gamal Abd el Nasser said, "Our basic objective will be the destruction of Israel. The Arab people want to fight." Israel's neighbors, along with such rhetoric, began a large-scale military mobilization. On June 5, 1967, Israel chose to attack rather than wait for the Arab armies to strike first. Within hours, Egypt's air force was destroyed and the war was all but won. The next day, at the United Nations, Abba Eban told the world, "Israel has in recent days proved its steadfastness and vigor. It is now willing to demonstrate its instinct for peace."

The Six-Day War produced many miraculous developments for the State of Israel. The military victory over the fully-mobilized armies of Syria, Egypt, and Jordan is still considered among the greatest achievements in modern armed conflict. Overnight, at least in the perception of the West, Israel was transformed from a scrappy, can-do underdog to a regional power. Israeli forces advanced through the Sinai Peninsula, the Golan Heights, the West Bank, and Gaza.

And then, Israel offered its defeated adversaries genuine peace. Days after the war concluded, Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan famously said he was "waiting for a phone call" from any Arab leader willing to discuss true peace with Israel. Years later, two of them—Egypt and Jordan—accepted Israel's right to exist, pledged not to attack it, received generous concessions in return and signed peace treaties that hold to this day.

Tragically, the Palestinians and Syria have been unwilling to accept this basic deal. Instead, their leaders have chosen a course of violence and steadfast rejection of the hated Zionist enemy.

Still, none of these outcomes of the war held more meaning than the capture and reunification of Jerusalem by Israeli forces on June 7, 1967. When the young Jewish state was forced to evacuate the Old City in 1948, it was only after putting up a valiant fight. Though the prognosis for successfully holding the Old City was never good, Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion famously stated, "The Jewish state cannot live without Jerusalem as a body cannot live without a heart."

Jerusalem has always been the heart of the Jewish people. Jerusalem is mentioned 349 times in the Tanach (the Hebrew Bible) and, three times daily, a Jew prays facing the Holy City. Our liturgy and literature for thousands of years attest to the centrality of Jerusalem. As Psalm 137 tells us, "If I forget you, Jerusalem, may my right hand wither. Let my tongue stick to my palate if I cease to think of you, if I do not keep Jerusalem in mind even at my happiest hour."

Thus, as Colonel Motta Gur shouted *Har Habayit b'yadenu* ("The Temple Mount is in our hands!") into his radio 40 years ago, it marked the miracle of the return of Jewish sovereignty in the Holy City for the first time in nearly two thousand years.

Jews were free to return to the Jewish Quarter of the Old City and rebuild their neighborhoods. They were free to build new synagogues to replace the old ones purposefully and systematically destroyed by the Jordanians. They were free to pray again before the Western Wall.

The Israelis were also free to demonstrate their belief in free exercise of religion. So they left the Temple Mount – Judaism's holiest site and the home to the Muslim shrines of al-Aqsa and the Dome of the Rock – to the control of the Muslim religious authority, the Wakf. Unlike the Jordanians, they left every mosque and every church standing. In the intervening four decades, all have been free to worship in the Holy City.

*Har Habayit b'yadenu* – The Temple Mount is in our hands! But we should always remember the thousands of years of longing and deprivation that preceded this miracle. And we must all vow to do what we can to make sure that Jerusalem remains the single and undivided capitol of the Jewish people and the Jewish state.

As the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Six-Day War draws nearer, you can learn more about the history and significance of these events by visiting [www.aipac.org](http://www.aipac.org).