

**Describe the strategic landscape facing Israel in 1967. Why did the Egyptian and Syrian military buildups and the blockade of the Straits of Tiran represent such a threat to the Jewish state's existence?**

Well, the Jewish state was confronted with hundreds of thousands of Arab soldiers on its borders—the Egyptian border, the Jordanian border and the Syrian border, thousands of tanks, many hundreds of warplanes, a tremendous sense of frenzy in the Arab world at the prospect of “throwing the Jews into the sea.” The Arab leaders were very open and expressed about their intention to destroy the Jewish state. It wasn't about changing a border here and there; it was literally about eradicating the state.

Israel was previously isolated in the world. Many people forget today that Israel confronted this Arab threat not with American arms but with French arms. Israel was allied with France. The eve of the war, France simply up and switched sides, switched to the Arab side. The United States was bogged down in Vietnam. It was not even able to uphold its promises to Israel to keep the sea lanes open through the Straits of Tiran. And Israel faced a massive Soviet threat from the Soviet bloc that was fully behind the Arabs. So Israel was completely isolated, facing Arab armies that were under a united command, that were absolutely open about their intention to destroy the Jewish state. That's about as existential of a threat as you can possibly get.

**As you mentioned, Arab leaders in 1967 repeatedly threatened Israel with annihilation. As an historian, do you think this was typical bombast, or did the Arabs have the will and the means to back up their threats?**

Well, they certainly had the means to make good on their threat; it's whether they had the ability to make good. They had the requisite troops, tanks, planes, and had the situation on the battlefield gone the other way, it was not inconceivable to have Egyptian tanks rumbling through the debris of Tel Aviv. It was quite possible.

**What was the difference in numbers and resources between Israeli forces and their Arab adversaries? How did Israel atone for the disparity to win the conflict in only six days?**

On troops, about one to 15. Tanks, probably about one to 10. Planes, also maybe one to 10, one to 15. There's no question that Israel was monumentally outnumbered in this war.

Israel overcame the disparity first of all by launching a pre-emptive strike against the strongest Arab adversary, Egypt, and in an exquisitely brilliant move, launched an all-out aerial strike against the Egyptian air force, which caught most of the Egyptian air force on the ground. Operation Focus destroyed over 250 Egyptian planes within one hour. This was simply the largest aerial victory in military history. And once Egypt was deprived of air power, Israeli ground forces were able to move against Egyptian defenses in the Sinai and overwhelm them. The second day of the war, the Egyptian commanders

already gave an order for a wholesale evacuation of Sinai, which caused chaos. So the Egyptian army was relatively easily overcome.

At the same time, Jordan and Syria began to attack Israel. Israel did not attack Jordan or Syria pre-emptively, and Israel was able to strike back at Jordan and prevail over Jordan and ultimately against Syria, as well.

**One of the Six-Day War's most enduring legacies was the reunification of Jerusalem under Israeli control. Can you describe the ways this change has benefited the city and people who would like to travel there?**

Prior to 1967, for example, Jews could not visit the Jewish holy sites in the Old City. They were prevented by the Jordanians from visiting the Western Wall, from visiting the Mount of Olives—all of that was out of bounds. Many Jewish synagogues in the Old City had been destroyed by the Jordanians. Many hundreds of grave sites and grave stones on the Mount of Olives, which was the largest Jewish cemetery in the world, were used by the Jordanian army literally to line their tent camps, and to line their latrines.

Since 1967, all of the holy sites in the Old City have been open to people of all faiths.

And generally, the city has grown, from what was basically a large village in 1967—about 20,000 people—to a metropolis of over a million people today.