

| OCTOBER 1981                     | JUNE 1982                   | AUGUST 1982                        | SEPTEMBER 1982   | MAY 1983                                |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Assassination of President Sadat | Israeli invasion of Lebanon | PLO evacuated from Beirut to Tunis | Massacre of Palestinian and Shi'a refugees at Sabra and Shatilla camps | Lebanese-Israeli peace agreement signed |

## The 1967 June War

### Ba'th (Arabic: Renaissance)

The name given to the pan-Arab socialist party founded by Michel Aflaq and Salah Bitar in 1947. Its first congress was held in Damascus. It subsequently spread to Lebanon, Jordan and Iraq and eventually resulted in the establishment of two rival Ba'thist regimes, one in Syria since 1963 and one in Iraq 1968–2003.

The origins of the Six-Day War lay, on the one hand, in the long-term issues of Israel's quest for security and recognition, and the Arab states' belief that they could defeat Israel and liberate Palestine if sufficiently armed. On the other hand, a series of events from 1966 onwards paved the short-term road to war. On 23 February 1966 a group of militant **Ba'thists** rose to power in Syria. Their hostile anti-Israeli rhetoric exacerbated the already bad Israel–Syrian border relations to such an extent that in August Syria and Israel engaged in a fierce clash in the area of the Sea of Galilee. In November, in a search for allies, Syria signed a mutual defence pact with Egypt. Israel now appeared to be caught between allied hostile states to the north and south, as well as fighting an ongoing low-intensity conflict against Palestinian guerrillas operating from Jordan. Consequently, Israeli decision-makers adopted a more hard-line security response. On 13 November Israel launched its most extensive ground operation since the Sinai campaign, raiding the Jordanian villages of as-Samu, Jimba and Khirbet Karkay. Fifteen Arab legion soldiers and three Jordanian civilians were killed and another 54 wounded in this operation. A clinic, a school and 140 houses were also destroyed. Thus it is not surprising that by the end of the year the region, once again, seemed to be on the brink of war.

The first half of 1967 saw no decline in hostilities. On 7 April Israeli aircraft shot down seven Syrian MiGs in an air battle over Damascus. On 13 May a Soviet intelligence report falsely claimed that Israeli troops were massing along the Syrian border. Neither Israeli nor UN claims to the contrary were able to defuse the situation. On 14 May Egyptian troops moved into the Sinai in order to reassure Syria as well as to deter Israel. Nasser's request for a partial withdrawal of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) which had been stationed in the Sinai since 1956 was met by the UN insisting that he choose between 'no withdrawal or complete withdrawal'. Not about to lose face, Nasser opted for the latter, effectively removing the buffer between Israel and Egypt. On 22 May Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran in another attempt to counter Arab criticism that his actions did not live up to his rhetoric. As in 1956, Israeli decision-makers saw the closure of the straits as a *casus belli*, especially in the context of Egyptian troop movements and general Arab mobilization. On 30 May Jordan, in order to avoid isolation, joined the Egyptian–Syrian defence pact. By June 80,000 Egyptian troops and 900 tanks, 300 Syrian tanks, 300 Jordanian tanks, and some 250,000

| DECEMBER 1987                         | OCTOBER 1991  | SEPTEMBER 1993   | OCTOBER 1994                                  | SEPTEMBER 1995                                       |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|--|
| Outbreak of the first <i>intifada</i> | Opening of the Madrid Arab-Israeli peace conference | The Declaration of Principles (or Oslo Accords) signed in Washington | Signing of the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty | Signing of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement |

Israeli troops, 1,093 tanks and 203 planes were ready for war. The Arabs demanded the liberation of Palestine and the Israeli population demanded immediate government action. Moreover, Israeli probing of American thinking about a pre-emptive strike produced an amber light. In this context, it was no surprise that last-minute Israeli-Egyptian negotiations in Washington on 3 June had little chance of succeeding. On 4 June Israel's prime minister, Levi Eshkol, formed a National Unity government and handed the defence portfolio to Moshe Dayan who tipped the balance in the cabinet in favour of a decision to launch a pre-emptive strike.

It was this succession of events that has allowed some historians to claim that the 1967 June War was an accident – the result of brinkmanship gone over the brink. Others have asserted that it was, in fact, Israel's quest for hegemony and territory that was the driving force. Israeli historians, conversely, have tended to blame Nasser, who by closing the Straits of Tiran left Israel with no alternative. The most interesting explanation, however, is that the war was the result of American-Soviet manipulation and that the Soviet intelligence report had been fabricated in order to entangle the United States in another arena of conflict while its forces were already under pressure in Vietnam.

On 5 June 1967 Israel's air force attacked the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian airfields simultaneously, destroying 304, 53 and 28 planes respectively, mostly on the ground. Having gained complete air superiority, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) crossed into the Sinai and into the West Bank. The ground war lasted until 10 June. As a result of the lack of co-ordination between the Arab states and the Syrian failure to engage the IDF until the end of the war, Israel was able to defeat first Egypt, then Jordan and then Syria one after the other rather than having to fight a proper three-front war. Israel's swift victory left it in control of the Sinai, the West Bank, the Golan Heights and, importantly, East Jerusalem, increasing Israeli territory threefold, uniting its capital and returning to Israel the Jewish holy places lost in 1948. Israel had now gained strategic depth, which it saw as vital to its security, and had territory that it believed could be exchanged in return for full peace and recognition.

Peace, however, remained elusive. The 1967 defeat had not only discredited the Arab leaders and notions of Arab unity, and caused another large wave of Palestinian refugees, but also resulted in a superpower stalemate with respect to attempts at resolution. Above all, it had further widened the gap between Israel and the Arab states. While the subsequent UN Resolution 242 laid the foundation for future negotiations by stressing the need for recognition, inadmissibility of

*see Chapter 12*

*see Map 18.1*