
1948-1988

ISRAEL

at forty



A topical inside look at the nation—
politically, socially, economically, and religiously—
as it celebrates its 40th birthday.

HL Willmington & Ray Pritz

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tion of the Holy of Holies on the
bers of the committee—Rabbi Dov
Mordechai Eliau, the Sephardic chief
building of a synagogue on the Tem-
dying temple rituals and the prepara-
e training of priests, all add to the
mple Mount for Jewish worship.
ommittees, however, are simply inter-
: aspects of the Temple Mount. But
are working for a Jewish presence on
uilding of the temple. Some of these
firmly believe that the Messiah will
Israeli nationalists, who view Muslim
n insult to the Zionist dream. But, in
alistic themes are hard to distinguish
is the same—Arab control over the
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WAR

Jesus said there would be “wars and rumors of wars . . . but the end is not yet” (Matthew 24:6). Since that time, many thousands have died attempting to conquer and defend the soil considered sacred to three major world religions—Christianity, Islam, and Judaism.

On May 14, 1948, the British flag was lowered in Tel Aviv for the last time. At 4:00 that afternoon, Israel was declared to be a nation again, amidst the singing of the Jewish National Anthem, the *Hatikvah*. While it was the beginning of the nation, it was also the beginning of a number of wars fought to maintain not only their nationhood but their very territory and lives.

THE WAR OF INDEPENDENCE

The day following their declared independence, Israel was invaded by Egypt, Jordan, Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon. Nearly 45 million Arabs went to war with 64,000 Jews. Britain's Field Marshall Montgomery predicted that it would take the Arabs but eight days to drive the Jews into the sea. Nine months and four days later, Israel had not only survived, but had come out much strengthened, with 23 percent more territory than they had been allotted in the 1947 partition plan.

The Arabs, outnumbering the Jews almost forty to one, had a very simple battle plan. Egypt was to attack from the south with 10,000 men, sweep up the Negev toward Tel Aviv with half the force, and the rest would move toward Jerusalem. Lebanese, Syrian, and Iraqi forces would move down from the north, through Galilee, into Haifa, and on toward Tel Aviv, where they would join up with Egyptian forces. From the East, Jordan would send 10,000 men to occupy the West Bank, capture the Old City of Jerusalem, and lay siege to the new city.

The outcome of the war was probably determined more by the

attitude of the two sides. To the Arabs it was a war of expansion and revenge; for the Jew it was sheer survival, a fact that is known to make people fight harder than for those who are fighting simply to gain more territory.

The Israeli battle plan was much more complex. The first goal was to defend to the utmost every Jewish settlement in the path of the invading armies, a task made difficult by the fact that the Israelis had 10,000 rifles, each with fifty rounds of ammunition, four ancient artillery pieces, and thirty-six submachine guns. The second goal was to piece together a navy to lift the blockade and bring in men, munitions, and immigrants by way of the sea. The next goal was to lift the siege of Jerusalem, and then to turn the tide of battle from defensive to offensive moves.

Each one of these goals was accomplished, perhaps the most dramatic being the rescue of Jerusalem. Since all the roads into Jerusalem were Arab-controlled, several thousand Israeli citizens carved out a road over the limestone hills through which food and weapons were brought in to defend the city. Banners displaying the words of Psalm 137:5 were flying from the vehicles bringing in the supplies and weapons: "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning."

The heaviest fighting occurred between May 15 and June 11, after which time a four-week truce was arranged by the United Nations. During the lull, huge amounts of weapons were purchased from Czechoslovakia, and when fighting began again, Israel inflicted heavy casualties on the Arabs on all fronts. During the next lull, a group of Jewish radicals, calling themselves the Stern Gang, murdered one of the U.N. mediators, Count Bernadotte, causing a great loss of image for the Israelis. Finally, on October 15, the war broke out again, and Israeli troops, by now well supplied, literally threw the Egyptians out.

THE SINAI WAR

In October 1956 Egypt, Syria, and Jordan prepared themselves again to encircle Israel. At the same time, Egypt had seized control of the Suez Canal Company and had occupied all of the Sinai. The British and French, moving against Egypt in retaliation for closing the Suez, made sudden air attacks, knocking out Egyptian air power. Israel seized the moment to launch an attack, overrunning and clearing the Sinai Peninsula, destroying or dispersing about a third of the Egyptian army, and

capturing huge quantities of Russian 5,600 prisoners and killed some hundreds while suffering 171 killed and

The situation in the Middle East many feared Armageddon was just and France attacked Egypt, Egypt Suez Canal in an attempt to close it ended to come to Egypt's aid and the back Britain if Russia did jump in however, the U.N. troops were able Israel to pull its troops out of the Sin

THE SIX-DAY WAR

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capturing huge quantities of Russian-built equipment, Israel took about 5,600 prisoners and killed somewhere between 2,000 and 3,000 Egyptians while suffering 171 killed and 600 wounded.

The situation in the Middle East at that time became so tense that many feared Armageddon was just around the corner. When Britain and France attacked Egypt, Egypt sank every ship and barge in the Suez Canal in an attempt to close it to western shipping. Russia threatened to come to Egypt's aid and the United States quickly promised to back Britain if Russia did jump in on Egypt's side. By December, however, the U.N. troops were able to restore order and to persuade Israel to pull its troops out of the Sinai, a decision it would later regret.

THE SIX-DAY WAR

All during the early 1960s minor border skirmishes and Arab terrorist attacks came, followed by reprisals by Israel. In 1966, Nasser made a pact with Syria in the event of an Israeli invasion. In 1967, terrorist attacks and Syrian bombardment of Israeli villages in the north continued. In retaliation the Israelis shot down six Syrian MiGs, while continuing their warnings to the Arab nations that Israel might have to take further reprisals if the attacks continued. Nasser began amassing troops in the Sinai, at the same time forcing the U.N. peace-keeping force to withdraw, and threatening this time to completely destroy Israel. Finally, Nasser closed the Straits of Tiran, threatening to blow up any shipping vessel bound for Elat.

When another war with the Arab nations seemed inevitable, Israel decided to seize the advantage. With several lightning air raids, beginning on June 5, Israeli Mirage and Mystere jets succeeded in destroying most of the air power of Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq before the planes could even get off the ground. Israeli armored columns then cut through the Negev and into the Sinai, overrunning more than 100,000 Egyptian forces stranded there without air cover. In a matter of hours, hundreds of armored vehicles were destroyed or captured.

By June 7, Egyptian resistance in the Sinai had collapsed. In the north, after serious fighting, Nablus and Jericho were captured, and at 8:00 P.M., Israel and Jordan had accepted a cease-fire called for by the United Nations.

For two days, Syrian artillery had been bombarding Israeli villages in Galilee, but the Israeli air force and infantry units by June 9 had

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overrun the gun placements. By the next day, Israeli forces were twelve miles into Syria, capturing villages as far north as Kuneitra. A cease-fire was arranged for 4:30 on the afternoon of June 10.

Egyptian losses in both men and equipment were very heavy, although casualty figures were never released by the Egyptian government. Jordanian casualties were listed as 6,094 killed and missing, 762 wounded, and 463 taken prisoner. Israeli losses were given at 679 killed and 2,563 wounded.

THE YOM KIPPUR WAR

Tensions between Israel and the surrounding nations have never been completely tranquil, but in the fall of 1973 the situation became worse. Finally, on a day when they thought Israelis would be least prepared to defend themselves, Egypt from the south and Syria from the north attacked. The assault was planned for 6:00 P.M. on October 6, which was Yom Kippur, a day when Israelis would have been observing a fast—their most holy day of worship. Russian satellite intelligence warned the Syrians that Israel was beginning to expect something and was making preparations, so the attack actually took place four hours earlier than scheduled.

The amassing of troops and armor was said to be the largest since the close of World War II, some 5,000 tanks and more than one million men—838,000 Arabs and 275,000 Jews. Egypt alone was said to have thrown 3,000 tanks, 2,000 heavy guns, and 600,000 men against the Israelis.

Considering just the strength of forces alone, it should have been the annihilation of the State of Israel that followed in the next nineteen days. Being caught so terribly off guard and outnumbered, Golda Meir later confessed, "For the first time in our twenty-five year history, we thought we might have lost."

At one time only a few dozen tanks stood in the way, both in the north and the south, of oncoming Arab forces. But during an unexplained two-day lull in the fighting Israel was able to regroup and, on October 19, a tank battle of unprecedented magnitude took place in the Sinai. When the dust cleared, Israel had won a tremendous victory and began pressing on into Egypt, conquering territory west of the Suez. In the north, Israel began pushing the Syrians back, and by the time a

cease-fire was arranged Israel Damascus.

During this war Arab casualties were more than 4,000.

WAR IN LEBANON

Over the years, Israel's border attack. In the early 1980s there were attacks on the section of northern Lebanon. These attacks came primarily in the southern part of Lebanon. In 1982, more than 400 rockets and shells were fired from there. These had resulted in only two deaths. At the time had come to clear southern Lebanon. In 1980, the Israeli Defense Forces launched "Operation Peace for Galilee," with the objective of clearing all the areas twenty-five miles from the border.

This initial objective was not achieved. It became quickly evident that, in the areas captured by Israel, there were found, some small and some large, a mosque, a school, a hospital, and a mosque. These had resulted in only two deaths. The amount of damage was many times what even the efficient Israeli Defense Forces could do in the area. Just in the southern part of Lebanon, it took trucks about five weeks to evacuate the area. For unknown reasons, the amount of damage was many times more than the PLO could do.

The invasion continued on into Lebanon. The Israelis themselves engaged in a war of attrition. The politicians had promised. There were attacks and there the Israeli Defense Forces launched air strikes on PLO headquarters. In September 1982, all PLO troops were expelled from the country, but others simply remained in the country.

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by the next day, Israeli forces were in villages as far north as Kuneitra. After the afternoon of June 10, casualties and equipment were very heavy, and those released by the Egyptian government were listed as 6,094 killed and missing, 762 Israeli losses were given at 679 killed

Surrounding nations have never been as united as in 1973 the situation became worse. The Israelis would be least prepared to fight from the south and Syria from the north on October 6, which was a surprise. The Israeli intelligence warned the Egyptians to expect something and was making the attack took place four hours earlier than

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WAR

A cease-fire was arranged Israeli troops were within twenty miles of Damascus.

During this war Arab casualties were more than 15,000 and Israeli losses were more than 4,000.

WAR IN LEBANON

Over the years, Israel's border areas have always been vulnerable to attack. In the early 1980s there had been numerous rocket and mortar attacks on the section of northern Galilee that bordered on Lebanon. These attacks came primarily from Palestinians who had set up operations in the southern part of Lebanon. In the year prior to June 1982, more than 400 rockets and shells had fallen inside Israel. Even though these had resulted in only two deaths, the Israeli government decided the time had come to clear southern Lebanon of this threat. On June 6, 1982, the Israeli Defense Force launched what they called "Operation Peace for Galilee," with the objective of removing PLO presence from all the areas twenty-five miles north of Israel's border.

This initial objective was reached within a matter of days, but it became quickly evident that, once started, the operation would not stop there. In the areas captured by the Israeli forces dozens of armed caches were found, some small and some large. The arms were usually situated near a mosque, a school, a hospital, or a church so as to deter the Israelis from hitting them with air or rocket attacks for fear that civilians would be injured. The amount of arms captured was staggering, some ten times what even the efficient Israeli intelligence had estimated was in the area. Just in the southern area of Lebanon it took 1,000 men and 150 trucks about five weeks to evacuate the many tons of arms captured. For unknown reasons, the amount of arms captured was overwhelmingly more than the PLO could have needed for its own troops.

The invasion continued on toward Beirut, where the Israelis found themselves engaged in a war of a much longer term than the few weeks the politicians had promised. The PLO had its headquarters in Beirut, and there the Israeli Defense Forces concentrated their attention, including air strikes on PLO headquarters and weapons dumps. Finally, in September 1982, all PLO troops were evacuated from Beirut. Many left the country, but others simply made their way to the north of the country.

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Still, Israel was not able to extricate itself from the quagmire of Lebanon. As casualty figures mounted, public support for the operation dwindled. In a poll taken in June 1982, 84 percent felt it was the right action to take, but by the time Israeli troops withdrew in June 1985, 40 percent felt that it had been the wrong step to take, and 75 percent felt the operation had been a failure. Never before in the history of Israel's wars had there been such a wave of antiwar protest. Even numbers of soldiers chose to go to prison rather than participate in the war.

In mid-June 1985 Israel completely withdrew from Lebanon. Even then, there was a declared buffer zone that would continue to be patrolled by Israeli troops to prevent the return of PLO troops. By the time of the withdrawal, more than 650 Israeli soldiers had died. On the day of the final pullback, two shells fell on northern Galilee, and such attacks continued periodically in the months that followed.

Israel takes advantage of 95 percent renewable water, perhaps the most expensive in the world. It has 50 billion cubic feet of water each year, but only 15 percent for urban and domestic use. The country's water supply grew from 75,000 acres in 1948 to 425,000 acres today.

One study conducted by Thomas M. Bruneau of Pennsylvania's Middle East Research Institute predicts that the water situation is increasingly tense days ahead for Israel and Jordan. At present, both countries could run out of water within a few years. With Israel's current use of 95 percent of its water, the Institute's study concluded that in the next 10 years it will need by 800 million cubic meters of annual water supply, or 8 billion gallons.

Jordan will have a deficit at that time. The water shortage is likely to cause serious problems of these two nations. The situation could lead to increased hostilities, even war. On the other hand, it could force the countries into negotiations and begin to cooperate to solve their differences.

The study concentrated on the Jordan River, the international boundary between the two countries. It suggests that Israel could deal with the crisis by restructuring its agriculture, which uses most of the water. Such a move would be difficult, not only because of economic problems but because of the political situation being so deeply rooted in Zionism.

Water has been a problem in Israel since its founding. Men fought the local inhabitants of the West Bank. The Old Testament shows Israel has always