

A tale of two cities: Istanbul vs Jerusalem (I)

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Recently there has been a good deal of talk on a return to the 1967 Arab-Israeli borders, including a fluid note by President Barack Obama. The first part of this mini series will visit Jerusalem in 1967, and return to Istanbul in 2011. First, a chronological anatomy of the events that led to the Six-Day War of 1967, and how the war was fought:

- Egypt's charismatic leader Gamal Abdel Nasser is the darling of the Arabs. He is dreaming of a pan-Arab state, but, he thinks, the major obstacle standing in his way is Israel. Nasser died of heart attack three years after the six-day war. His friends said he died with a broken heart.
- Israel's not-so-charismatic Prime Minister, Levi Eshkol, is not anyone's darling, especially during the diplomatic crisis, which led to the 1967 war. Many Israelis doubted his ability to run a country that was heading to war on multiple fronts. He, too, had a dream. It was not a pan-Israeli state, nor the conquest of Jerusalem. He dreamed of peace. And he, too, died with a broken heart, according to his wife.
- In the spring of 1967, Syria was harboring and training Palestinian militants who declared their holy cause as the "annihilation of the state of Israel." In one incident, Israeli and Syrian fighter jets clash, and Prime Minister Eshkol issued a mild warning to Damascus.
- The Kremlin takes Eshkol's warning seriously. In 1967, Egypt, like Syria, is on the Soviet camp. In the spring of 1967, Soviets secretly give startling news to Egypt's parliament speaker, Anwar Sadat: In one week, Israel is poised to attack Syria. Sadat speeds the news to Nasser.
- Cairo orders four divisions to the Sinai border. It also calls thousands of reserve soldiers. Finally, 40,000 soldiers, more than 300 Soviet-made tanks, artillery and personnel carriers cross into the Sinai. Arab nations cheerfully support the Egyptian build-up on the border.
- Soviet intelligence proves to be a hoax. Israel does not attack Syria. But Nasser cannot step back from the idea of finishing off Israel militarily. He is under pressure from his own top brass, his own nation and the Arab world.
- Meanwhile, as Israel celebrates the 19th anniversary of its foundation, the war cabinet mobilizes one brigade, 3,000 men, and calls up reserves. Israel's population is 2.5 million.
- A United Nation buffer zone manned with a few thousand soldiers separate enemy troops. The peacekeeping mission has been there for over 10 years. On May 16, Nasser orders the U.N. Force Commander Indarjit Rikhye to evacuate his force within 48 hours. When Rikhye asks one Egyptian commander if Egypt was aware of the consequences, the commander replies: "Oh sir, I'll meet you at lunch in Tel Aviv." The force leaves, and Egypt and Israel are left alone.
- On May 22, Nasser closes the Straits of Tiran to Israeli shipping, virtually a declaration of war. The move electrifies the Arab world, especially the Palestinians in East Jerusalem who had been displaced in 1948. Nasser talks about a return to the pre-1948 borders, meaning no Israel.

- U.N. Secretary General U Thant arrives in Cairo but fails to convince Nasser who tells him privately that he is afraid of a coup or assassination. The Egyptian generals want war, Nasser says.
- Israeli Foreign Minister Abba Eban goes to Washington, but fails to secure United States help as President Lyndon Johnson does not commit the U.S. to help if Israel is attacked.
- There is excitement and support in the Arab world for the coming war. Kuwait pledges its army to the United Command along with Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia. Saudi Arabia's King Faisal joins the coalition, and says, "We want to see the extermination of Israel."
- On May 30 Jordan's King Hussein flies to Cairo to sign a defense pact with Nasser. The Jordanian army will now be commanded by an Egyptian general.
- CIA tells Israel's chief spy, Meir Amit, "We don't plan to do anything if Israel is attacked."
- At 7:50 a.m. on June 5, the Israeli Air Force takes off to hit every air base in Egypt simultaneously. In three hours, the Egyptian air force is totally destroyed, having lost 280 modern fighters and bombers. It takes two more hours to destroy the Syrian Air Force and minutes to destroy Jordan's.
- Arabs dance on the streets as Radio Cairo broadcasts great victories against Israel. Israel orders total radio silence. Since Israel has destroyed Jordan's communications lines, Jordan gets war news from Radio Cairo. In a telephone conversation, Nasser tells King Hussein that Egyptian planes are over Israeli skies. Encouraged with the (fake) news Jordan shells Israeli cities.
- The Battle for Jerusalem begins. Israel sends paratroopers to Jerusalem. In five hours, Jordanian resistance is broken.
- Nasser's telephone conversation with Hussein is intercepted, in which the two argue whether they should blame the U.S. or the U.S. and Britain for the humiliating defeat. Both, they agree.
- At U.N. negotiations, Egypt and Syria refuse ceasefire and land for peace an agreement.
- The Egyptian army withdraws from the Sinai. Israel takes tens of thousands of prisoners whom it later releases.
- In four days, Israel defeats Egypt and Syria and controls all of Jerusalem. But Syrian shelling begins. On the fifth day, Israel attacks Syria and captures the Golan Heights. This time, at the U.N., Syria wants ceasefire but Israel resists. Israeli army forwards as close to as 40 miles from Damascus. Then Israel calls a halt and agrees to ceasefire.
- The Six-Day War is over. Israel now controls 3.5 times more land than it had six days ago, including Jerusalem. It offers to give back Sinai and the Golan Heights in return for peace. It is willing to negotiate over the West Bank but insists on keeping all of Jerusalem.
- One month after the war Arab leaders convene in Khartoum. Nasser is still the undisputed leader of the Arab world. Arab leaders refuse a joint U.S.-Soviet proposal for land for peace. The convention ends with four notes: No recognition of Israel; no peace; no negotiations; and all Arab states are to prepare for military action.

Let's try to rid ourselves from the chains of religious ideology or just ideology and try to be fair. The return to the 1967 borders means a no-loss bet, an oxymoron. It's tantamount to betting money on a game, losing it and making a scene at the bet shop to take back the money. In warfare terms, this would be similar to Greeks proposing Turkey a return to the pre-1923 borders: They attacked, they lost, and they, unlike the Arabs, have no intention to capture central Anatolia in the 21st century.

Here, the question is simple: Would the United Arab Emirates today agree to return to the 1967 borders if their glorious eight-nation united force had succeeded to annihilate Israel four decades ago? The Arabs

should be able to understand that they can always enjoy lunch in Tel Aviv, like Israel's peaceful Arab citizens do, once they overcome their religious and ideological hatred of the "Jooos" and make peace with them.

(to be continued)

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