



## ON: The 1967 Six Day War

### The Looming Threat

In the mid-1960s, the goal of the Arab states was to destroy Israel. Syria used the 3000-foot high Golan Heights, which overlooks northern Israel, to shell Israeli farms and towns. Throughout 1965 and 1966, Syria's attacks on Israel increased. Egyptian President Nasser's rhetoric also became more bellicose: "We shall not enter Palestine with its soil covered in sand. We shall enter it with its soil saturated in blood."



In response to the Syrian incursions, Israeli jets shot down six Syrian fighter jets on April 7, 1967. Soon afterward the Soviet Union deliberately misinformed its ally Syria about a massive Israeli military buildup; Syria in turn invoked its defense treaty with Egypt. On May 15, 1967 some 100,000 Egyptian troops moved into the Sinai and amassed near Israel's border. A few days later, Syrian troops prepared for battle along the Golan Heights.

On May 22, Egypt unilaterally closed the Strait of Tiran, which is on the southern tip of the Sinai Peninsula. This closure effectively cut off Israel's only trade route with Asia and stopped the flow of oil from its main supplier, Iran. This closure of international waters was an act of war according to international law.

On May 30, Jordan's King Hussein signed a defense pact with Egypt. And on June 4, Iraq joined the military alliance with Egypt, Jordan and Syria. Nearly 250,000 Arab troops, more than 2,000 tanks and 700 aircraft were arrayed in battle formation along Israel's borders. Arab leaders openly declared their intentions of militarily destroying Israel.

The combined Arab armies were in a position to strike Israel from the West Bank, the Golan Heights and the Gaza Strip. An Arab first strike risked severing Israel at its narrowest point, which was only 9 miles wide. The Egyptian army, striking from Gaza, could cut off Tel Aviv from Jerusalem, while the Jordanian army surrounded western Jerusalem on three sides. The situation for Israel was dire, as Israel's reserves – the backbone of the Israeli army – had been mobilized for three weeks, thus bringing Israel's economy to a standstill.

### Israel's Pre-emptive Strike

After fruitless political efforts at the United Nations, and despite the best efforts of the United States to find a diplomatic solution, as a matter of self-defense and survival, Israel preemptively attacked Egypt on June 5, 1967.

The United States imposed an arms embargo on the entire region. France, Israel's other main arms supplier, also embargoed arms to Israel. Meanwhile, the Soviets continued to supply massive amounts of arms to the Arab states. Israel's strategy was to win the war as quickly as possible.

In only six days of combat, Israeli troops demolished enemy forces in the Sinai, the Golan Heights and the West Bank. The international community called for a cease-fire on June 10 just as Israel was in position to bring the battle to the Egyptian, Syrian and Jordanian capitals. Israel gained control of the entire West Bank, Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula and the Golan Heights.