

Did Israel Want The Six Day War?

Michael B. Oren

Great wars in history eventually become great wars about history. Only a few years after the last soldier leaves the battlefield, accepted truths about the nature of a military conflict and the motivations for it invariably come under assault by revisionists and counter-revisionists, whose vehemence can rival that of the original combatants. Few of these historiographical struggles are as bitter as the one now being waged over the Arab-Israeli wars, in which a force of self-proclaimed “new historians” has laid siege to previously unassailable descriptions of the creation and survival of the Jewish state. The unusual ferocity of the debate over Arab-Israeli history is directly related to the singularly high stakes involved. The adversaries are not merely vying for space on university bookshelves, but grappling with issues that have a profound impact on the lives of millions of people: Israel’s security, the rights of Palestinian refugees, the future of Jerusalem.

The new historians make no attempt to disguise their agenda. Ilan Pappé, a Haifa University historian active in the Hadash (Communist) party, has recently published a three-part series—what amounts to a manifesto—in *The Journal of Palestine Studies*. Pappé portrays the “new history”

as a pervasive revolutionary movement that has taken root in all fields of Israeli intellectual life, arts and media. Its goal, he declares, is to “reconsider the validity of the quest for a Jewish nation-state in what used to be geographic Palestine.”¹ Beginning with Simha Flapan’s *The Birth of Israel* (1987), and continuing through Avi Shlaim’s *Collusion Across the Jordan* (1988) and *1948 and After* (1994) by Benny Morris, the new historians have set out to explode what they call the “myths” surrounding Israel’s establishment and first decade of existence. In its 1948 War of Independence, for example, Israel is accused of uprooting thousands of Palestinians—one expression of a deeply ingrained Zionist proclivity for “transfer”—and then of plotting with Arab reactionaries to deny them a state. The Arab leaders of the day “stood in line” to make peace with Israel, the claim goes, but the Jewish state refused.² Instead it embarked on a campaign of unjustified and gratuitously violent retaliatory raids, culminating in the 1956 war, when Israel conspired with the imperialist powers, Britain and France, in an unprovoked attack against Egypt.

Published by leading academic presses and widely acclaimed by reviewers, the new historians’ radical interpretations have largely supplanted traditional Zionist histories.³ This success would not have been possible without the diplomatic documents made available at various government archives under the thirty-year declassification rule allowing access to previously classified material, a rule observed by most Western democracies. Papers released by Britain’s Public Record Office and the United States National Archives, for example, provide fresh insights into the diplomacy of the 1940s and 1950s, particularly in relation to the Arab countries, whose archives remain closed indefinitely. But when it comes to Arab-Israeli history, no collection can rival the Israel State Archives which, in addition to the wealth of firsthand accounts it contains, is particularly liberal in its declassification policy. These documents, tendentiously read and selectively cited, have been marshaled to substantiate the most radical of revisionist theories about the 1948 War of Independence and the 1956 Sinai Campaign. With the thirtieth anniversary of the Six Day War now

behind us, the same methodology is about to be applied to smashing the “myths” of 1967.

The historical controversy over 1967 will be especially brutal. The belief that the Six Day War was imposed on Israel by an alliance of Arab states bent on its destruction, and that Israel’s conquest of territories was the result of its legitimate exercise of the right to defend itself in a war which it did everything in its power to avoid, has been sacrosanct for Zionists across the political spectrum. That the final disposition of those territories continues to be the focus of Israel’s internal political debate and of ongoing international negotiations makes the 1967 war a hugely inviting target for radical reinterpretation.

With the revisionists’ approach lauded regularly in the Israeli press, the first shots in this battle are already being fired. A prime example is the assertion of Haim Hanegbi, political columnist for the daily *Ma’ariv* newspaper:

The war of June 1967 has not been fully researched, and much about it remains classified. Perhaps the proper time has not yet come. Israeli hearts may still be unprepared for the difficulty involved in criticizing the war that was viewed not only as the greatest military victory in Israel’s history, an example to the world, but principally as a sign from heaven, the footsteps of the Messiah, and a harbinger of redemption.... It must be remembered that in 1967 the army was still commanded by former members of the Palmah [the elite fighting unit of the Israeli War of Independence] who were burning to exploit the Six Day War to complete what was denied them in 1948: To take over the Palestinians’ remaining territories and, through the power of conquest, realize the true Greater Israel.⁴

In the academic world, the initiative has come from the social sciences rather than history departments. According to this school, the Six Day War erupted not as a result of Arab belligerency but in reaction to socioeconomic factors within Israel, as a tactic by the nation’s leaders to distract attention from their failed domestic policies. “It is conspicuously anomalous to encounter in the mid-1960s a period of recession and unemployment in the

midst of nearly two decades of rapid economic growth...,” writes political economist Michael Shalev. “Beginning in the autumn of 1966, unemployment reached double-digit levels. Recovery began only in the wake of belated expansionary policies initiated in response to growing citizen unrest....”⁵ Political scientist Yo’av Peled and sociologist Yig’al Levy agree, asserting that “the process of escalation that started in 1964 was ‘not necessary’ in the sense that it did not stem from the exigencies of the Arab-Israeli conflict. The force of Israel’s reactions in those years expressed ... a certain strategy ... compensating for the state’s retreat from its social principles....”⁶

These authors seem to share the belief—which is strongly implied, if not yet openly asserted—that Arab actions had little to do with the outbreak of hostilities in 1967, and that Israel not only failed to prevent war but actively courted it. The massing of Egyptian troops in the Sinai, the expulsion of the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) and the closing of the Straits of Tiran, the Arab defense pacts and public commitments to eradicate Zionism—all were either provoked or blown out of proportion by Israel for its own purposes of internal cohesion, territorial expansion or other ulterior motives. It is to such motives that Oxford-based Israeli historian Avi Shlaim refers when he asserts that “[Egyptian President] Gamal Abdel Nasser ... was perceived by Israeli hard-liners as Israel’s most dangerous enemy. Accordingly, military pressure was used in 1956 and 1967 in vain attempts to engineer his downfall.”⁷

But can these conclusions stand up to straightforward historical scrutiny? Can the assertion that Israel wanted the war, did little or nothing to avert it, or even instigated it, be substantiated by Israeli declassified documents from the period, the favored weapons of the new historians? Newly released files from the Israel State Archives—reviewed here as part of a study-in-progress on the war that will eventually incorporate American and British papers as well—reveal a great deal about Israeli policymaking and diplomacy of the time, and about what Israel’s leaders thought, feared and strove for during their three weeks of intense diplomatic efforts leading up to June 5, 1967. But far from even hinting that Israel deliberately brought

about the conflict, the record shows that Israel was *desperate* to avoid war and, up to the eve of battle, pursued every avenue in an effort to avert it—even at great strategic and economic cost to the nation.

One might say that the Six Day War was mainly about water. At issue were the rights to use the Jordan River and to free navigation through the Straits of Tiran,⁸ both points of friction since soon after Israel's independence. But the conflicts over these two bodies of water were merely presenting problems. Beneath them surged the darker currents of inter-Arab rivalries, Soviet machinations, and the visceral antagonism that the existence of Israel evoked among its neighbors.

The immediate source of conflict grew out of Israeli efforts to divert the waters of the Jordan River to irrigate the Negev. After vigorous American attempts to negotiate a solution to the problem were rejected by the Arabs, Israel in 1964 unilaterally revived its diversion project along the Syrian border. Israel's decision coincided with an unprecedented nadir in inter-Arab politics, when Arab regimes were viciously riven by ideological and dynastic struggles, and bogged down backing opposing sides in Yemen's interminable civil war. Gamal Abdel Nasser, Egypt's ambitious and charismatic president, saw Israel's Jordan River initiative as an opportunity to rally the fractured Arab world under his leadership and an excuse to extricate his beleaguered forces from Yemen.⁹

But the fact that Nasser welcomed heightened tensions with Israel did not mean that he wanted a war—not yet anyway, not until Egypt was fully prepared for it. In the interim he made a show of belligerency by establishing the Palestine Liberation Organization, and by approving Syrian plans to deny Israel virtually any water by diverting the Jordan River at its source. Both of these policies backfired. Refusing to sit idly by as its water supply dried up, Israel bombed the Syrian earthworks in July 1966; and, unappeased by the creation of a largely symbolic PLO, the Palestinian

group al-Fatah began conducting terrorist operations across Israel's northern border, and later from Jordan in the south.

These events set in motion a spiraling escalation leading to the signing of a mutual defense pact between Syria and Egypt on November 4, 1966. One week later, Israel launched a large-scale reprisal raid against the West Bank village of Samu', believed to be a stronghold of terrorist activity. Then, in a dogfight on April 7, 1967, Israeli jets shot down six Syrian MiGs. The Arab leadership—Nasser, Jordan's King Hussein, and the radical Ba' thist regime in Syria—began berating one another for not answering the Zionist aggression. Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol and IDF Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin began to warn of military action against Syria if the provocations continued. These warnings were repeated and amplified by the Arab media, which increasingly clamored for war.

Still, this did not mean that a full-blown war was necessarily in the offing. The turning point came on May 11, 1967, when the Soviet Union began to furnish Egypt with false intelligence reports of Israeli preparations for war, described as thirteen brigades—40,000 troops, hundreds of tanks—gathered on the northern border. Israel's objective, Moscow warned, was to topple the Syrian regime.¹⁰ Many theories have been forwarded to explain the motivation behind these reports. It would seem that elements in the Kremlin leadership were not so much interested in sparking a war as they were in pressing Arab states into closer alliance with Egypt, as a way to extend Moscow's influence in the region.¹¹ And Nasser was quick to exploit the opportunity. Though informed by his own military leaders that there was no danger of attack—Syria itself was not on alert—he seized the warning as a pretext to order Egyptian forces into the Sinai Peninsula, giving Egypt direct military access both to the Israeli border and, perhaps even more important, to the Straits of Tiran.

The Straits of Tiran, the narrow Red Sea passage leading to Israel's southern port city of Eilat, had long been a sensitive point for Israel. In 1950, Egypt had blocked the Straits to Israel-bound ships, and successive attempts by Israel to challenge the blockade in the United Nations failed, as



Source: Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), map 2, p. 39.

did its efforts to convince the maritime powers to continue shipping to Eilat. Along with Palestinian terrorist attacks from Gaza, it was Egypt's denial of access to the Indian Ocean and points east that had impelled Israel to launch its Sinai Campaign of October 1956. Its forces succeeded in opening the Straits, and in return for withdrawing its troops, Israel received from the Americans a firm, public recognition of its right to act in self-defense against any attempt to renew the blockade.¹² Israel's rights were further assured by UNEF troops stationed in the Sinai Peninsula, and in particular at Sharm el-Sheikh, on the Egyptian coast of the Straits of Tiran.

By replacing the UNEF forces in the Sinai with Egyptian troops in May 1967, Nasser would achieve two significant and long-sought goals: A dramatic improvement in Egypt's own strategic position vis-à-vis Israel, and a compelling rejoinder to his enemies within the Arab world—the Jordanians, the Saudis—who had accused him of hiding behind the skirts of the UN.¹³ On May 14, long columns of Egyptian infantry and armor crossed the Suez Canal into the Sinai, soon doubling the number of Egyptian forces there.

UN observers attested to the absence of any sign of mobilization in Israel, and the Israelis themselves invited Soviet representatives to tour the northern border. Through diplomatic channels Israel assured Nasser that it had no belligerent intent. The Mossad, Israel's secret service agency, even tried to reactivate a secret communication conduit it had maintained with senior Egyptian air force officer Mahmoud Khalil until July 1966. The Egyptians had summarily cut the connection, and now thoroughly rebuffed Israeli attempts to renew it.¹⁴

None of Israel's efforts had any effect; Egypt's build-up continued apace. On May 16, Egypt ordered UNEF troops to evacuate the Sinai and concentrate in Gaza, purportedly for their own safety. United Nations Secretary-General U Thant might have resisted the move, or at least requested a General Assembly review of UNEF's mandate. Instead the Secretary-General—a weak figure with a fondness for non-aligned leaders—promptly complied with Nasser's demand. He even took it a step further, and removed the UNEF troops from Gaza as well.¹⁵

These developments caught Israel, then at the height of its Independence Day celebrations, completely off guard. Although the IDF had contingency plans in the event of renewed friction on the Egyptian border, and on the Jordanian and Syrian fronts as well, Israelis had grown accustomed to an Arab world that was deeply divided and capable of little more than rhetoric. Now, suddenly, the international force that had served as a buffer for over a decade had been evicted, and thousands of Egyptian troops were pouring into the Sinai.

The situation caused deep concern in Israel, though not yet panic. The government's consensus at this point was that Nasser had no interest in bloodshed, only in a public relations victory to shore up his prestige. At worst, he wanted to provoke Israel into starting a war itself, and so incur international censure. To avoid this trap, Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who also held the defense portfolio, resisted the advice of IDF Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin to call up the reserves; instead, he merely placed the army on a higher state of alert.¹⁶ The Prime Minister tried to project an image of confidence and calm, all the while concealing his own sense of foreboding. "There will be war," he confided to his closest advisor, "I tell you, there will be war."¹⁷

Throughout the crisis that was beginning to unfold, Eshkol was set on finding a diplomatic solution that would defuse the tension and restore the *status quo ante* in the Sinai. The bulk of that task naturally would fall to his foreign minister, Abba Eban, and to the Israeli diplomatic corps. Eban realized that with the UN compromised and the Europeans averse to antagonizing the Arabs, the only hope for a solution lay with the United States. He had some reason for optimism: President Lyndon Johnson was strongly sympathetic to the Jewish state, authorizing economic and military aid to Israel against the advice of both the State Department and the Pentagon. Johnson also had a marked antipathy for Nasser. He regarded him as an ingrate and a Soviet stooge, and had cut off all but symbolic aid to the Egyptians.¹⁸ But Johnson's ability to maneuver in the Middle East was severely limited by the war in Vietnam, which had sapped much of America's prestige overseas and had deeply divided its people. Even as they looked to

Washington, Israeli diplomats were well aware that Johnson's political weakness at home had emboldened the Soviets to act as they did, and that Nasser was banking on American impotence.¹⁹

On May 17, 1967, in the first of what would be a series of intense meetings on the crisis, Israel's ambassador to Washington, Avraham Harman, received an assurance from United States Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow that the Jewish state "did not stand alone."²⁰ The United States agreed to intervene with the Russians, dispatching its UN ambassador, Arthur Goldberg, to meet with his Soviet counterpart, Nicholai Federenko, to urge restraint on Moscow.²¹ In return for the American effort, Rostow asked that Israel consult with Washington before taking any military steps. Legally, the Egyptians were within their rights in transferring troops to their own sovereign territory in the Sinai, Rostow concluded, and a preemptive strike by Israel at this stage would be "a very serious mistake."²²

Rostow's words had a disquieting resonance for the Israeli leaders, who remembered the 1956 Suez crisis. Then, the Eisenhower Administration had threatened to levy economic sanctions on Israel if it failed to withdraw from Sinai and Gaza. Now, the Johnson Administration was willing to work toward returning the UNEF contingent to the Sinai and evacuating the Egyptian troops, but was equally committed to preventing an Israeli military initiative. That determination was underscored in a May 17 letter from President Johnson to Prime Minister Eshkol. The President was explicit: "I cannot accept any responsibility on behalf of the United States for situations which arise as the result of actions on which we are not consulted."²³

This admonition coincided with the further reinforcement of Egyptian troops in the Sinai, and reports of Egyptian naval vessels moving into attack positions in both the Red Sea and the Mediterranean. Arab leaders and their state-controlled media, meanwhile, were whipping up a war frenzy. In Syria, Foreign Minister Ibrahim Makhous declared that "the withdrawal of the UN forces means 'make way, our forces are on their way to battle.'"²⁴ According to then-Defense Minister Hafez el-Assad, the Syrian army had "its finger on the trigger and demand[ed] that the battle be expedited."²⁵

Cairo Radio challenged Eshkol to combat—“try all your weapons; they will spell Israel’s death and annihilation”—while its counterpart in Amman proclaimed Jordan’s “readiness to wage the battle of destiny with the enemy.”²⁶

Israel’s response was to begin to call up reserves—18,000 men on May 17, and an additional 17,000 the following day. As Israeli diplomats in Washington explained, this decision did not indicate any hostile intent. It was merely a “necessary precaution,” and they asked that assurances to that effect be conveyed to Cairo and Damascus.²⁷ Meanwhile a more direct appeal was made to the Soviets: Eban summoned Alexander Chuvakhin, the Soviet ambassador to Israel, hoping to persuade Moscow of Israel’s good will and its desire to avoid war with Egypt. Instead, the Foreign Minister was treated to a harangue in which Chuvakhin ascribed the entire crisis to a CIA plot and Israeli propaganda.²⁸ Eban had no greater success with U Thant, who had announced his intention to visit Cairo in an attempt to defuse the crisis. Why not stop in Syria and Israel as well, Eban suggested, and mediate a comprehensive solution? The answer was a flat No; the Secretary-General’s only business was with Nasser.²⁹

Its diplomatic options narrowing, Israel again turned to the United States. The results of Ambassador Harman’s first effort had been less than promising. Contrary to its pledges to take firm action to rein in Nasser and revive UNEF, the White House had taken no significant steps in either direction. American diplomacy seemed to extend only so far as seeking a Security Council review of the situation, something Israel regarded as an utter waste of time. Simultaneously, Administration officials from the President on down were going out of their way to warn Israel of the perils of acting alone. Secretary of State Dean Rusk went even further, suggesting that UN forces be redeployed, this time not only on Egyptian soil but on the Israeli side of the border as well. Increasingly, it appeared the Administration was not only willing to accept the new disposition in the Sinai, but might even ask Israel to pay a price for maintaining it.

As the first week of the crisis neared its end, then, Israel faced not only an unanticipated increase in Arab belligerence, but an equally unexpected

doubt about America's resolve to honor its commitments. As Harman summarized it for Foreign Minister Eban: "Insofar as the [American] goal is to avoid any military confrontation, and insofar as they are convinced that there is no chance of moving Nasser and the Soviets to take any steps that might be interpreted as retreat, we have to be prepared for the possibility that the United States will pressure us to make concessions on issues that they believe are not critical to us.... There is the danger that the United States believes that it can impose its will on us."³⁰

On May 18, in an effort both to convey Israel's lack of hostile intent and to demarcate the limits to its patience, Prime Minister Eshkol informed the Americans that Israel would make no military move "unless the Egyptians take action to close the Straits"; similar undertakings were made to the British and the French as well. The implicit quid pro quo was that if the Straits were blocked, the United States would fulfill its commitments of 1957 to give Israel its full backing in reopening them. The Administration seemed responsive to Eshkol's call: Meeting with Efraim Evron, the chief of Israel's diplomatic mission in Washington, Undersecretary Rostow declared that "the 1957 agreements are alive, just as all our other commitments are." He went on to emphasize, however, that the mere presence of Egyptian troops was insufficient to justify war so long as Nasser had not actually closed the Straits. He also rebuffed Evron's request that a ship from the United States Sixth Fleet, then in the Red Sea vicinity, make a demonstration voyage through the Straits to Eilat, saying that the fleet's presence in the Middle East was "unscheduled," and was already resented by the Arabs.³¹ Absent a blockade of Eilat, the Johnson Administration was unwilling to endorse any measures other than a Security Council debate and the Secretary-General's visit to Cairo. The Administration wanted to exhaust all possible options of international mediation, going so far as to invite Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin to cooperate in a "joint initiative of the two powers to prevent the dispute between Israel and the United Arab Republic and Syria from drifting into war."³²

The Israelis chose to abide by the Administration's approach. Though stunned by the size of the Egyptian mobilization thus far—80,000 men

and 600 tanks in less than three days—they continued to send assurances to Nasser, via the Americans, of their country's peaceful intentions.³³ The thrust of Israel's policy was to wait and see what, if any, results U Thant achieved in Egypt, at the same time seeking tangible signs of America's backing with a request that the United States supply twenty warplanes to the Israeli air force.³⁴

Neither Johnson's nor U Thant's course of action appeared promising, however, and the mood in the Israeli government darkened considerably. On May 21 Eshkol told his cabinet, "I believe the Egyptians plan to stop Israeli shipping or bomb the atomic reactor in Dimona. A general attack is liable to follow." Rabin, similarly glum, warned that "it will be a hard war.... There will be many casualties," and recommended that Israel take the minimal step of calling up more reserves, while continuing to pursue its diplomatic options to the end.³⁵ Heeding this advice, Eshkol addressed the Knesset the next day on the need for "reciprocal respect for the sovereignty, integrity and international rights" of all Middle East nations.³⁶ Again, Eshkol used the opportunity to attempt to defuse the crisis. He purposely stopped short of condemning Egypt's buildup in Sinai and later, secretly, sent U Thant another message for Nasser, urging him to refrain from any action in Tiran.³⁷

Such conciliatory gestures by Israeli leaders, designed to mollify the Egyptians and entice them into mediation, had the opposite effect: Nasser took them as signs of weakness. Emboldened by Israel's failure to respond forcibly to UNEF's ouster, and dazzled by the praise being heaped on him throughout the Arab world, he took the step that would vastly increase the chances of armed conflict. On May 22, while U Thant was en route to Cairo, Nasser visited one of his air bases in the Sinai. Telling a rapt assembly of fighter pilots that "the Jews threaten war and we say *ahlan wa-sahlan* (welcome)," he announced a renewal of the Tiran blockade.³⁸

Nasser's decision to close the Straits was a defining moment in the crisis. By the late 1960s, the port town of Eilat on the Red Sea had become a vital factor in Israel's economy as a center for commerce and shipping, the terminus for imports of Iranian oil and other essential goods, and for exports of Israeli products to Africa, Asia and beyond. More than the financial blow it dealt Israel, however, the blocking of Israel's access to the Red Sea was an immense political victory for Nasser: It was an overt act of war, one that bolstered his popularity in the Arab world, and thus his ability to wage an actual armed conflict. Until then the Israeli government had been willing to live with the expulsion of UNEF and even with the Egyptian army's buildup in the Sinai, but now the stakes had changed dramatically. No longer a matter of a potential military clash along Israel's southern border, the threat had become, as Chief of Staff Rabin observed, "a question of 'to be or not to be.'"³⁹ Nasser himself drove the point home in a speech to his National Assembly: "If we have been able to restore the conditions to what they were before 1956, God will surely help and urge us to restore the situation to what it was in 1948... We are now ready to confront Israel. We are now ready to deal with the entire Palestine question. The issue now at hand is not the Gulf of Aqaba, the Straits of Tiran or the withdrawal of UNEF, but ... the aggression which took place in Palestine in 1948 with the collaboration of Britain and the United States."⁴⁰

Israeli leaders had been bracing themselves for the closure of Tiran since the outset of the crisis. "When we reach that river we'll look for a life preserver," Eshkol had quipped. But once it became reality, Nasser's move sowed near-panic. "We are going to war against Egypt and Syria by ourselves," Rabin told the Prime Minister the next morning, making it clear that no military assistance would be forthcoming from any country. Ezer Weizman, the Chief of IDF Operations, agreed, adding that Israel and the Arabs had come to the brink of "total war." Briefing the cabinet later that day, IDF Intelligence Chief Aharon Yariv noted that Nasser "has moved from a position of reluctance to go to war ... to a position of willingness to

become entangled in a total war, and even to initiate one at a time he sees fit.”⁴¹ To respond to the new situation, Rabin proposed staging a lightning air strike against the Egyptian air force—Israel’s air force had been rehearsing the attack, code-named Moked, for several years—followed by an armored thrust into Gaza and Western Sinai; the areas captured would later be exchanged for the reopening of Tiran and the reinstatement of UNEF. The longer Israel waited, Rabin explained, the bigger and better-fortified Egypt’s resistance would become. If Israel was forced to attack an entrenched and fully prepared army, its casualties would be that much higher—perhaps as many as fifty thousand. Meanwhile, Israel’s power of deterrence would be lost, and Nasser would be in a position to attack at will.⁴²

Although the military establishment had become certain that war was now inevitable, most of the government remained unconvinced. With some exceptions (most vocally Minister of Labor Yig’al Allon, a member of the Ahdut Ha’avoda faction), the majority expressed strong reservations: They preferred to continue searching for a diplomatic solution despite the costs of delay. Leading this camp were Education and Culture Minister Zalman Aranne of Mapai, and Interior Minister Haim Moshe Shapira of the National Religious Party. Even if it succeeded, they argued, an air strike would leave northern Israel totally exposed to Syrian attack. Moreover, Israel would be going to war without a firm American commitment to its defense. “I’m willing to fight,” Shapira averred, “but not to commit suicide.”⁴³

Caught between these opposing factions was Prime Minister Levi Eshkol, who also had to contend with growing public disapproval of his handling of the crisis. Pressure was mounting both within and outside the cabinet to form a national unity government with opposition leader Menachem Begin, and to have Eshkol replaced as defense minister with a more redoubtable figure, such as Allon or the flamboyant former IDF Chief of Staff Moshe Dayan, of Ben-Gurion’s breakaway Rafi faction. But Eshkol held fast to the diplomatic course, sanctioning a last-ditch initiative: Foreign Minister Eban would embark on a three-day sweep through

Western capitals, to find out whether the Powers, and the United States in particular, would rally to Israel's defense.

The principal diplomatic goal of Eban and the Israeli representatives in Washington was a commitment from the United States and, if possible, France and Britain, to reopen the Straits—the only measure, as far as Israel was concerned, that would prevent war. To this end, they pursued a brinkmanship-style policy, intimating the possibility of an Israeli preemptive strike as a means of prodding the United States to take decisive action against Nasser.⁴⁴ In describing the Straits as an “unconditional and paramount interest,” the Israelis were looking for an unqualified, public commitment from the United States to lift the blockade—by itself if necessary—and to uphold Israel's right to self-defense.

Then, on May 23, President Johnson gave the Israelis reason to hope that a diplomatic solution could still be achieved. In a wire to Eshkol, Johnson asked that Israel refrain from taking any military action over the next forty-eight hours, during which time his administration would pursue alternate avenues. “The problems discussed in your letter to me are occupying the attention of the highest officials of this government,” he wired Eshkol, “and will continue to do so until they are resolved.” He thanked the Prime Minister for his assurances regarding the “precautionary” nature of the Israeli mobilization, and reiterated his adherence to previous American pledges to Israel, and his determination to resolve the crisis “in the United Nations or outside it.”⁴⁵ This carefully chosen phrase alluded to a British proposal for sending a convoy of ships, one from each of the forty maritime powers, through the Straits. The plan, later dubbed Red Sea Regatta, seemed the ideal way simultaneously to challenge the blockade, pacify Israel and satisfy a Congress opposed to any action that would risk involving the country in another Vietnam. In fact, it was the only way, since the Administration had ruled out unilateral American action.⁴⁶ Just to make sure Eshkol got the message, the United States rejected Israel's appeal for twenty warplanes—and instead approved a shipment of gas masks.

While the Americans were working out the details of the Regatta plan, Eban set off for Europe. In France—Israel’s major backer in the 1956 campaign and its chief military supplier since then—the reception was cold. The Quai d’Orsay had all but ignored Israel’s communications on the crisis. To Eban, President Charles De Gaulle denigrated the international Regatta idea, insisting that the only solution lay in a four-power initiative involving the USSR. While the Straits might once have constituted a French interest, “that was 1957, and now it is 1967.”⁴⁷ There was little room for debate. At his next stop, London, Eban enjoyed a warmer reception, yet the results of the visit were only slightly encouraging. While stopping short of rejecting the idea of an Israeli preemptive strike, Prime Minister Harold Wilson confined his remarks to expressing support for international action to open the Straits, and for continued efforts to talk sense into the Soviets.

Having encountered reluctance on the part of both France and Britain to take direct action, Eban now faced the ultimate test in Washington, where he would arrive on May 25. Eban succinctly stated for Ambassador Harman the goal of his visit:

We have to be clear with the United States that Israel has decided not to make peace with the closure of the Straits. Before we take the necessary steps to defend our rights, we want to explore over the next two days alternative measures, and especially to clarify the willingness of the United States to assure freedom of passage immediately... We cannot be satisfied with an American declaration that leaves the Straits in Nasser’s hands.⁴⁸

At stake, Eban continued, was not only the possibility of war, but the credibility of American commitments.⁴⁹

In the twenty-four hours leading up to Eban’s visit, Israel’s representatives labored frantically to reach a *modus operandi* with the Americans, working through UN Ambassador Goldberg, Supreme Court Justice Abe Fortas, Democratic Party activist Arthur Krim—anyone who had the President’s ear.⁵⁰ These efforts failed to impress the Americans, who responded by again urging

forbearance upon Israel, advising it to “play out all the options,” and not to “forfeit the international perception of Nasser as the bad guy.” Rostow, Goldberg and other Administration officials repeated their government’s intention to live up to its commitments, to stand up to Nasser and the Soviets, and to take concrete action to end the blockade. But, just as adamantly, they stressed the limits of Johnson’s latitude, his congressional constraints and the need to work through the UN. They even expressed resentment at the mounting pressure being exerted on the White House by Israel’s supporters in the United States.⁵¹

At this stage, Israel’s hopes for preventing war rested on convincing the Americans to take action on the Tiran blockade. Responsibility for this task fell to Foreign Minister Abba Eban. A brilliant orator, Eban had previously served as Israel’s ambassador to the United States and to the UN, and was widely felt to possess the moral authority necessary to convince the Americans to act.

Immediately upon landing in New York on May 25, the stakes of Eban’s visit were raised, as he received the first of several highly classified and agitated telegrams from Jerusalem informing him that the Egyptians would launch a surprise attack in two days’ time. “The Arabs are planning a total offensive,” the message began. “The main problem is not the Straits. The problem is Israel’s very existence. The deterioration of the West’s position is encouraging the Arabs, and each hour that passes increases their appetite. You must clarify with Johnson what practical steps the United States intends to take.” Specifically, Eban was instructed to seek an American pronouncement equating aggression against Israel with aggression against the United States.⁵² The new demands appeared to show Israel in a panicky light, though later events were to prove that the assessment was correct.

It befell Eban to present this radically revised assessment to the Americans. Dean Rusk was the first official scheduled to meet him and, of all of Johnson’s senior advisors, the one least sympathetic to Israel. Still, the

Secretary of State did not reject out of hand Israel's requests for direct American guarantees, saying he would promptly refer them to the White House. Less reserved was Undersecretary of State Rostow, Eban's host for dinner that evening at the State Department. The President, Rostow stated, could not guarantee Israel's security without congressional approval, and the chances of obtaining that, under the circumstances, were scant. Seeing the futility of pursuing this, Eban conceded. Nonetheless, he continued his pitch for direct American action to prevent war, saying he needed to return to Israel with a "firm plan of execution" from the Americans—the implication being that without such a plan, force would have to be used. Rostow's only response was that the maritime powers would continue to prepare their options. A statement would soon be issued which, he hoped, would suffice to deter Nasser.⁵³

The following morning, Friday, May 26, Eban received a phone call from Rusk. The President, Rusk said, had asked to postpone his meeting with Eban to Sunday. The reason: U Thant was due back from Cairo, and the President wanted to read his report first. Eban refused the request, however, explaining that he had to be back for the cabinet meeting in Israel on Sunday, "perhaps the most crucial cabinet meeting in our history." A decision would be taken "based on what President Johnson conveys to me today.... I tell you frankly that I think we are in for hostilities next week," Eban concluded. "There will be an act of blockade that will be resisted."

Rusk's reply was terse. "I get you," he said, and hung up.⁵⁴

Eban then proceeded to the Pentagon for talks with Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and Gen. Earl Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Both men dismissed Israeli claims of an impending Egyptian offensive, while appealing to Eban to supply details of Israel's new assessment of an impending Egyptian attack: "If you have information to that effect, share it."⁵⁵ Western intelligence sources reported that Nasser had no intention of opening hostilities, although he might want to draw Israel into launching a limited first strike which he would be able to deflect, and then respond to with massive force.⁵⁶

Apprehensive and ambivalent, Eban headed for his final and most crucial meeting, with President Johnson at the White House. Johnson's mood was no less troubled. He felt impatient with being "pushed around," as he called it, by American Jewish groups, was irked at the Canadians for leaking word of Red Sea Regatta to the press, and resented being faced with what amounted to an Israeli ultimatum.

Ambassador Harman accompanied Eban into the meeting. Present on the American side, in addition to the President, were McNamara, Gen. Wheeler, Presidential Press Secretary George Christian, Joseph Sisco of the State Department, and Walt Rostow, Eugene's brother, who was a senior White House advisor. Eban began by saying that "We are on a footing of grave and anxious expectancy," and reviewed Israel's decision to withdraw from Sinai in 1957 on the strength of its faith in American commitments. He mentioned the telegrams from Jerusalem, the most urgent he had ever seen, that cast doubt not only on Israel's welfare but on its very survival. Needed was a public statement to the effect that the United States was coordinating its military strategy with Israel, and detailing its response to any future Egyptian attack. "The question to which I have to bring the answer is, do you have the will and determination to open the Straits?" he asked. "Do we fight alone or are you with us?"

Johnson's reply was forthright and somber. The United States was not going to risk war and a confrontation with the Soviets just because Israel had set Sunday as its deadline. The problem was Vietnam and the need for decisive congressional support for any course of action in the Middle East. "I am not a king in this country," he exclaimed, "and I am no good to you or to your Prime Minister if all I can lead is myself.... I know that your blood and lives are at stake. My blood and lives are at stake in many places and may be in others. I have got to have a chance to let my people come with me.... I do not have one vote [or] one dollar for taking action before thrashing this matter out in the UN." At the same time, however, Johnson also abjured any trust in the UN ("A big zero") or its Secretary-General ("You don't have to be learned to know what I think about him"). The President did go so far

as to make a general promise to the Israelis: "What you can tell your cabinet is that the President, the Congress and the country will support a plan to use any or all measures to open the Straits."⁵⁷ But he also emphasized that the only answer lay in the proposed international convoy, which would be ready to launch within two weeks. He asked the Israelis to be patient—Washington was about to shut down for the long Memorial Day weekend—and to utilize their diplomatic ties to promote the convoy project. "You in Israel have the best intelligence and the best embassies, so put them to work to line up all those who are concerned about keeping this waterway open."

The conversation then turned to what Eban called "the general problem," Israel's inclination to strike. Here the President was most emphatic. Citing the conclusions reached by American intelligence that Egypt had no intention of attacking, Johnson warned of the dangers Israel faced through unilateral moves: "Israel should never make itself seen responsible in the eyes of America and the world for making war. *Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go it alone.*" He repeated this last line three times, and requested information on Israel's plans. Eban did not supply an answer. He merely proposed creating a joint U.S.-Israel military committee to serve as liaison for the duration of the crisis. On cue from the President, McNamara agreed to look into the matter, but cautioned that the body would have to remain top secret.⁵⁸

So ended the ninety-minute meeting, the diplomatic denouement of weeks of efforts to avoid a third Arab-Israeli war. They had produced little more than Johnson's admonition not to launch a first strike, his general pledge to "use any and all measures in his power to ensure that the Straits and the Gulf will be open to free and innocent passage," and Eban's commitment to present that pledge to his government. The Foreign Minister came away distraught by what he later termed "the rhetoric of impotence ... [of] a paralyzed president." And, after Eban left the room, Johnson slumped down into his chair and sighed, "I failed. They're going to go."⁵⁹

But it was the Egyptians, not the Israelis, who were preparing “to go.” As Israeli intelligence had warned, the leadership in Cairo had authorized a major military attack against Israel’s port city of Eilat and other strategic targets in the Negev.⁶⁰ The plan, code-named Asad, was to be put into operation the following day, Saturday, May 27, and would have gone ahead had not Johnson hotlined the Kremlin, passing along Eban’s warning of an impending Egyptian attack. The result was a visit to Nasser at three in the morning by Soviet Ambassador Dmitri Pozhdaev, who conveyed Moscow’s stern objection to any initiation of war by Egypt. Nasser promptly canceled the attack.⁶¹

War had been narrowly averted, but the crisis remained at full pitch. On Saturday, Eban returned to find Israel in a state of almost unbearable tension. The army calculated that every day of inaction was costing the country twenty million dollars and, once war broke out, thousands of battlefield casualties. Rabin, stricken by the sense that he alone bore the burden of Israel’s fate, and wounded by criticism of his military leadership from his former mentors Ben-Gurion and Dayan, had suffered a temporary breakdown.

On Sunday, May 28, the cabinet convened to hear Eban’s final report. Allon and many other cabinet ministers were relieved that Johnson had not threatened to punish Israel if it attacked, that it could “go it alone” if it wanted to. Others were not convinced. The problem was not only the ambiguity of the American position, but also Israel’s ability to win. “I have more confidence in American promises than I do in the IDF’s capacity to break the Egyptian army,” confessed Interior Minister Shapira.⁶² Warning that future generations would condemn the government if it failed to explore every alternative to war, Eban recommended that the government delay its decision for three weeks, giving the Americans enough time to gather their Red Sea convoy.

In the end, the matter was settled by a message from Johnson that arrived at the height of the cabinet debate. It warned of possible Soviet intervention to aid the Arabs in the event of war, and petitioned Israel “not to take preemptive military action and therefore make itself responsible for the initiation of

hostilities.” Another aide-memoire, this one from Kosygin, further specified the dangers Israel would face if it attacked first. The cables tipped the scales in Eban’s favor, and the government resolved to give American diplomacy another chance. Though pessimistic about the chances that Red Sea Regatta would succeed, Eshkol agreed to a three-week delay, and several ministers followed his lead. Privately, the Prime Minister decided to send Mossad chief Meir Amit to seek further clarifications of Washington’s policy and, at the same time, to try to focus American Jewish pressure on the White House.⁶³ Despite Johnson’s belief that he had failed to prevent an Israeli strike, the government of Israel in fact had decided, yet again, to delay action in the hope of finding a diplomatic solution.

The next day, May 29, two reports arrived from Washington which appeared to vindicate that decision. The first, a report on Eban’s meeting at the White House from Walworth Barbour, America’s ambassador to Israel, placed special emphasis on Johnson’s vow to employ “any and all measures” to reopen the Gulf; a second, from Secretary of State Rusk, outlined the “substantial progress” that had been made in building the international convoy. De Gaulle also cabled, reaffirming the principle of free passage through the Straits. For the first time, the crisis seemed to be headed on something other than an inexorable path towards war.⁶⁴

That impression, however, proved to be short-lived. In an effort to calm the country’s mood, Eshkol that same day delivered another nationally broadcast speech, again couched in conciliatory terms as a further gesture to Johnson.⁶⁵ But the Prime Minister, not the most inspirational of leaders even in the best of times, botched his delivery and appeared to be on the verge of a breakdown. Panic spread among the public, while in the army dissatisfaction with Eshkol’s leadership came to a head. “With our own hands ... we have destroyed our most powerful weapon—the enemy’s fear of us,” declared Gen. Ariel Sharon at a meeting between Eshkol and IDF divisional commanders. “We will have to pay a far higher price in the future for something that we in any case have to do now.... The people of Israel are ready to wage a just war ... the people understand and feel that they have to

pay the price.... The problem is not the Straits. The problem is the survival of the people of Israel.” The other generals—Yisrael Tal, Uzi Narkiss, Yeshayahu Gavish, David Elazar, Elad Peled—agreed, and charged the government with abandoning its historic duty and endangering the state. Col. Yisrael Li’or, Eshkol’s aide-de-camp, feared that the Prime Minister might conceivably be ousted by his own army, or else succumb to physical and mental exhaustion.⁶⁶ Yet despite it all, Eshkol remained committed to the decision to delay military action.

Meanwhile, Israel’s strategic position continued to deteriorate. At the UN, U Thant had all but abandoned his mediation efforts—Nasser had rejected his proposal for a two-week moratorium on the blockade—while the Security Council was deadlocked by both French and Soviet obstruction.⁶⁷ Moreover, Israel was beginning to experience acute shortages of oil and essential foodstuffs due to the blockade. Moscow’s communications had also taken a minatory turn, attacking “the reckless activity initiated by war-mongering circles” in Israel, and warning of the grave consequences that would result from any Israeli aggression.⁶⁸

Accompanying this depressing news from abroad was word of even more disturbing developments in the region. IDF intelligence reported that another Egyptian armored division had entered the Sinai; that Sudanese, Iraqi and Kuwaiti troops were en route to the front; and that Syrian forces were poised to invade the Galilee. Along the Gaza border where former UNEF positions had been occupied by units of the Palestine Liberation Army, shooting and land-mining incidents increased at an alarming rate, as did armed infiltrations from Jordan and Syria. Questioned by reporters on the fate Israelis could expect after the Arabs won the coming war, PLO Chairman Ahmad Shuqayri replied, “Those who survive will remain in Palestine. I estimate that none of them will survive.”⁶⁹ President Abdel Rahman Muhammad Aref of Iraq was no less categorical: “The existence of Israel is an error that must be rectified. This is our opportunity to wipe out the ignominy which has been with us since 1948. Our goal is clear—to wipe Israel off the face of the map. We shall, God willing, meet in Tel Aviv and Haifa.”⁷⁰

The upsurge in Arab war preparations climaxed the following day, May 30, when King Hussein of Jordan signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt that placed his army under Cairo's command. He returned to Amman with a troop of Egyptian commandos ready for action, declaring, "all of the Arab armies now surround Israel."⁷¹ He was not exaggerating. Israel suddenly found itself facing the likelihood of an onslaught from three fronts, by armies totaling some 465,000 men, nearly 3,000 tanks and 810 planes—a force several times the size of the IDF, at a time when the nation's international isolation was virtually complete.⁷² So far Nasser had achieved a stunning victory without firing a single shot. "We are ready to settle the problem of Palestine," he triumphantly told the Egyptian Popular Council on that day. "It is we who will decide the time and the place of the battle and we will not leave the decision to Israel as was the case in 1948."⁷³ Even without opening hostilities, Cairo was now in a position to strangle Israel economically, or to force it into a war from which it was likely to emerge humbled and condemned, if at all.⁷⁴

Meanwhile, the Red Sea Regatta plan had foundered. Even the Dutch and the Canadians, who at first had enthusiastically supported the plan, had backed off from it, fearing a military clash with Egypt and a cutoff of their Middle East oil supplies. An increasingly frustrated President Johnson was of a mind to undertake the task unilaterally, but the Pentagon strongly objected: In the best case, the Defense Department reasoned, the United States would be saddled with permanently patrolling the Straits; in the worst case, the Egyptians would open fire, triggering a chain of events that might well lead to catastrophe.⁷⁵ Virtually none of this information was shared with the Israelis. In their conversations with Harman and Evron, Rusk and Rostow insisted that Johnson was making good progress in drumming up support on Capitol Hill, and that American and British boats were already steaming toward Tiran. Wary that the Israelis themselves might be tempted to test the blockade with one of their own ships, the Americans kept urging them to be patient and calm: Under no circumstances should they be the first to fire.⁷⁶

It was not until Wednesday, May 31, that Israel finally discovered the truth about Red Sea Regatta. Final proof of the plan's failure came in the form of an exchange of messages between Eshkol and Johnson. The Prime Minister wired the White House welcoming Johnson's pledge to open the Straits "by all and every means." Israel fully expected that an Egyptian attempt to block the international convoy would be answered with naval power, he wrote. The President quickly instructed Rostow to inform Harman that the United States could in no way fulfill such a commitment.⁷⁷ The Israeli ambassador responded by reminding Rostow of Eban's "fateful move," when he had implored the Israeli government to defer action on the strength of Johnson's word. "What you have told me now will be received with great bitterness in Israel and [will] certainly generate momentum for a unilateral move. The Israeli public cannot stand it any longer," he said.⁷⁸

The public had in fact reached the breaking point. Throughout Israel, people were filling sandbags for use in taking defensive measures, and donating blood to prepare for expected casualties; fourteen thousand hospital beds had been prepared, and mass graves dug in Tel Aviv's municipal park. IDF Operations Chief Ezer Weizman burst into the Prime Minister's office: "If you give the order [to launch an attack], Jewish history will mark you as a great leader. If you don't, it will never forgive you." At this point, Justice Minister Ya'akov Shimshon Shapira, who was also present, broke down sobbing.⁷⁹ Such demonstrations of emotion were becoming common among the nation's leaders, and Eshkol had lost the will to weather them. On May 31, he gave in to pressures to create a national unity government with opposition leader Menachem Begin; the next day he accepted Moshe Dayan as his defense minister.

The formation of the national unity government and appointment of Dayan were not, however, tantamount to a decision to go to war. In a stormy meeting at IDF headquarters on Friday, June 2, cabinet members and generals argued the pros and cons of initiating hostilities. Again, IDF

Intelligence Chief Yariv opened with an intelligence briefing: "This is Egypt's finest hour.... The United States does not intend to act seriously to open the naval blockade by force nor does it intend to take far-reaching steps to solve the conflict between Israel and Egypt." After Yariv, Rabin spoke, restating his belief that "no one other than we ourselves can relieve us of the military and diplomatic stranglehold that is tightening around us.... Our main objective must be to deliver a decisive blow to Nasser. That, I believe, will change the entire order of the Middle East." The floor was then given to Gen. Motti Hod, the air force commander, who outlined the logistics and objectives of the Moked operation. "The air force is ready to go into action immediately," Hod concluded. "There is no need to wait, not even twenty-four hours...."

Impressive though it sounded, Hod's élan still failed to persuade many of the ministers. "How are our cities protected against bombing?" asked Interior Minister Haim Moshe Shapira. "What are the estimated losses [in planes] in the event that we attack their airfields?" asked Education Minister Zalman Aranne. Hod had ready answers for all their questions, except the one posed by Health Minister Yisra'el Barzilai, who raised the specter of Soviet intervention following a successful first strike. Sharon then rose to object to Israel's constant "kowtowing" to the Powers. "If we want to survive here, we have to stand up for our rights," he exclaimed—prompting Eshkol to remind him that that same "kowtowing" had brought Israel the arms it now possessed to defend itself. "In a country of two million souls, we have to ask ourselves," said the Prime Minister, "if we have to fight every ten years, will we have an ally to help us? Can we consult with an ally today, and tomorrow say: We thumb our noses at you?"⁸⁰

Conspicuously silent throughout these exchanges was Moshe Dayan. The newly installed Defense Minister had already made his position known, informally, to some government and military leaders: He favored launching an attack the following Monday, June 5, with the goal of eliminating Egypt's air force and its military presence east of the Mitla and Giddi passes in the Sinai; he also ruled out any Israeli advance to the Suez Canal, into the West Bank, or up onto the Golan plateau.⁸¹ Even these limited objectives,

however, did not yet win Eshkol's unqualified approval. This he withheld pending receipt of the latest impressions gleaned by Mossad chief Amit on his return that night from Washington.

The blunt and dependable Amit had met with Defense Secretary McNamara, as well as some thirty American intelligence experts, among them CIA head Richard Helms, Deputy CIA Director Rufus L. Taylor and James Angleton, the agency's veteran liaison with the Mossad. Throughout the talks, Amit had sought to be as provocative as possible, telling the Americans that he intended to go back with a recommendation for war.⁸² He learned that U.S. intelligence agreed with Israel's estimates of Arab military might, and was willing to share some of its own information with the IDF. Most significant to Amit, however, especially in his talks with McNamara, was the absence of any strong American objection to unilateral Israeli military action.

Upon his return to Israel in the early hours of June 3, Amit met with Eshkol, Eban, Dayan, Allon and Ambassador Harman, who had also returned from Washington. Amit's message was to the point: Though the United States had no intention of opening the blockade by force, it would not object to Israeli actions to punish the Egyptians. But then, in an apparent about-face, he advised the government to wait another week, and then send an Israeli ship through the Straits. Harman agreed. Allon, however, objected: "The minute we send that ship the Egyptians will know we're about to attack." Dayan could not contain himself. "Whoever waits for the Egyptians to start the war has got to know that we'll lose the land of Israel!" He added, shouting, "It's lunacy to wait!"⁸³

Events over the next twenty-four hours only reinforced Dayan's conclusions and removed Eshkol's lingering reservations about going to war. Disappointment with American policy, already keen in Israel, deepened with news of a State Department plan, long favored by Nasser, to submit the Straits issue to the International Court of Justice. The Administration seemed increasingly hesitant to discuss the Regatta initiative, preferring instead to focus on the idea of the maritime powers making a declaration in support of free passage

through the Straits. The impression that Washington was willing to abide by the blockade and the removal of UNEF was reinforced by the dispatch of two highly regarded representatives to Cairo.⁸⁴ The result was an invitation for Egyptian Vice President Zakhariyya Muhieddin to come to Washington on June 7, with U.S. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey later to pay a reciprocal visit to Egypt.

The only encouragement Israel received, however oblique, came from Arthur Krim and Abe Fortas, both close associates of Johnson. The two told Evron that the President had despaired of a diplomatic solution, and that he appreciated the chance Israel had given him to find one. UN Ambassador Arthur Goldberg approached his Israeli counterpart, Gideon Rafe'el, reminding him that "you stand alone and have to know the consequences," but then adding a personal note: "I understand that if you have to act alone, you will know how to act." These messages, viewed against the background of Israel's rapidly disintegrating deterrence ability and the impressions conveyed by Amit, convinced Eban, the most obstinate in opposing the war, that the time had come to act. The United States appeared to be staunchly behind Israel, and would not fault it for defending itself.

Or would it? That same day, another message reached Eshkol from Johnson. Though "the exchange of views with General Amit" was mentioned, the aide-memoire emphasized the importance of the ideas for the maritime powers' declaration and convoy, as well as the need for coordination with both Congress and the United Nations. Johnson promised "to provide as effective American support as possible to preserve the peace and freedom of your nation and the area," but then qualified that pledge by adding, "our leadership is unanimous that the United States should not move in isolation." He concluded by stressing the need for Israel to avoid "making itself responsible" for the outbreak of war, repeating the warning that "Israel will not be alone, unless it decides to go alone."⁸⁵

Going into the fateful cabinet meeting of Sunday, June 4, the question of whether the United States would condemn or condone an Israeli preemptive strike could not be definitively answered. Nor could any minister or military

leader say for sure what the Soviet reaction would be. The meeting, which convened at 8:15 A.M., opened with presentations by Harman and Yariv. An analysis of Johnson's policies was heard, as was a report on Egypt's moving its army from a defensive to an offensive disposition, apparently with the intention of occupying Eilat. Ministers Barzilai and Shapira continued to raise objections, expressing fear of international censure if Israel fired first. "Let them censure us," Allon snapped. "We'll survive." Seven hours of deliberations followed, during which it was decided, *inter alia*, to advise King Hussein of Jordan that no harm would befall his country if it refrained from joining the conflict. Then, an exhausted and emotionally drained government voted unanimously to authorize the security forces, under the authority of the Defense Minister and the IDF Chief of Staff, to mount "military operations to liberate Israel from the current siege and to preempt the impending attack from the forces of the United Arab Command."⁸⁶

Three weeks of unbearable tension, of exhaustive efforts to impel the United States, the United Nations and the world community to restore the *status quo ante* and prevent the outbreak of war, had ended. Israel had decided "to go it alone." By 8:00 the following morning, Israeli planes had penetrated Egyptian airspace.

The newly released Israeli diplomatic documents from the period leading up to June 5, 1967 offer overwhelming evidence against any suggestion that Israel sought war with the Arabs. Nor do the tens of thousands of papers so far declassified contain a single reference to any desire to divert public opinion from the economic situation, to overthrow Arab rulers or to conquer and occupy the West Bank, the Sinai or the Golan Heights. On the contrary, the picture that emerges is one of a country and leadership deeply fearful of military confrontation, and desperate to avoid one at almost any price. The sole hope of doing so, the Israelis believed, rested with the United States. But the Johnson Administration, though favorably disposed to Israel, was severely limited by domestic political constraints and its all-consuming involvement

in Vietnam. These limitations prevented the Americans from taking the measures that might have restored the *status quo ante* in the Sinai and the Straits of Tiran and stemmed the momentum toward war that Nasser had generated.

Moreover, it cannot be claimed that Israel was wrong in considering the use of force. Confronted with a harsh economic blockade, military pacts between heavily armed neighbors for the express purpose of aggression against Israel, and hundreds of thousands of enemy troops actually massed on its borders, it would have been the height of irresponsibility for Israel's government *not* to plan for preemptive action. Nor can Israel be faulted for employing the *threat* of force to spur the United States to intervene diplomatically. The few measures Johnson did adopt—reiterations of America's 1957 pledges on Tiran, the Red Sea Regatta proposal, the representations to Arab leaders—were directly attributable to those intimations by Israel. And, in the final analysis, the Israelis held back from acting militarily until the very last opportunity for a diplomatic settlement had passed, even though they knew that every day they waited was costing them dearly in resources, readiness and morale, and was likely to constrict their own maneuverability if war became unavoidable.

Given the archival records, it seems the new historians face a formidable task in trying to prove that Israel had hostile intentions in 1967. But the historiographical battle over the Six Day War has scarcely begun. In addition to the Israeli archives, numerous other primary and secondary sources must be culled, and further controversies tackled. Researchers confront a battery of potentially explosive issues, among them the conquest of the Golan, the flight of West Bank refugees, the annexation of Jerusalem and the origins of the peace process. The conclusions reached here can only be considered preliminary—if not quite the first round in this battle, then certainly an opening shot.

Dr. Michael B. Oren is a Senior Fellow at The Shalem Center in Jerusalem. He is currently working on a history of the Six Day War.

Notes

1. Ilan Pappé, "A Post-Zionist Critique of Israel and the Palestinians, Part II: The Media," in *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Spring 1997), pp. 37-43.

2. Avi Shlaim, observation made at a Tel Aviv University conference on Arab-Israeli historiography in April 1989.

3. For a critical overview of the "new history," see Michael B. Oren, "Out of the Battleground: The New Historiography of the Arab-Israel Conflict," in *The Radical History Review* (1989), pp. 85-97.

4. Haim Hanegbi, "Where are the Messiah's Footsteps?" *Ma'ariv* Supplement, June 14, 1998, p. 9.

5. Michael Shalev, *Labour and the Political Economy of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford, 1992), p. 200.

6. Yo'av Peled and Yig'al Levi, "1967 and Israeli Sociology," in *Te'oria Uvikoret* (Winter, 1993), p. 124.

7. Avi Shlaim, "Israeli Interference in Internal Arab Politics," in Giacomo Luciani and Ghassan Salame, eds., *The Politics of Arab Integration* (London: Croom Helm, 1988), p. 235.

8. The conventional version of the history of the Six Day War can be found in a number of dependable sources. See, for example, Ze'ev Schiff, *A History of the Israeli Army, 1874 to the Present* (New York: Macmillan, 1985); Eric Hammel, *Six Days in June: How Israel Won the 1967 Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Scribners, 1992); Walter Z. Laqueur, *The Road to War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968); Nadav Safran, *From War to War: The Arab-Israeli Confrontation, 1948-1967* (New York: Cambridge, 1969).

9. Furthermore, in achieving his goals, Nasser knew he could count on the support of the USSR, whose leaders understood Egyptian preeminence and Arab unity to be synonymous with Soviet dominance of the Middle East.

10. Richard B. Parker, *The Politics of Miscalculation in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 5, 14; Richard B. Parker, *The Six Day War* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), p. 42; Anwar Sadat, *In Search of Identity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), pp. 171-172.

11. Theories on the Soviets' motivation in promoting the false intelligence report abound. See, for example, Parker, *Six Day War*, pp. 35-41, 48-49; Anthony Nutting, *Nasser* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1972), pp. 397-398; Michael Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis: Diplomats and Demagogues Behind the Six Day War* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 2; Safran, *From War to War*, pp. 276-277; Ali Abdel Rahman Rahmi, *Egyptian Policy in the Arab World: Intervention in*

Yemen 1962-1967, A Case Study (Washington, D.C.: University Press of America, 1983), pp. 232-235; Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy* (New Haven: Yale, 1975), pp. 359-361; Michael Brecher, *Decisions in Crisis: 1967 and 1973* (Berkeley: UCLA, 1980), p. 36.

12. America's pledge to Israel is well-documented in the U.S. National Archives (hereafter USNA) and in the Eisenhower Papers. See, for example, USNA 674.84.A/2-757 New York to Secretary of State and Eisenhower Presidential Library, Dulles Papers, Subject Series, Telephone Calls, Box 6: Dulles to Lodge, Feb. 10, 1957.

One of the leaders in the fight to prevent Eisenhower from levying sanctions on Israel was Democratic Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson.

13. Nasser had often considered expelling UNEF from Egypt's territory. Gen. Muhammad Fawzi wrote, "Both President Gamal Abdel Nasser and Marshal 'Amr made it clear to me before 1967 that they wanted to seize on any international or regional situation which would permit doing away with that force [UNEF].... That opportunity came when Egypt declared that it was ready to enter battle against Israel if the latter attacked Syria...." Muhammad Fawzi, *The Three Year War* (Cairo: Dar al-Mustaqbal al-Arabi, 1980), p. 69. [Arabic] See also Muhammad Hassanayn Heikal, *The Explosion* (Cairo: Marcaz al-Ahram, 1990), pp. 444-456 [Arabic]; Abdel Latif Al-Baghdadi, *Memoirs* (Cairo: al-Maktab al-Misri al-Hadith, 1977), pp. 167-219 [Arabic]; Abdel Magid Farid, *Nasser: The Final Years* (Reading: Ithaca, 1994), p. 73; Indarjit Rikhye, *The Sinai Blunder* (London: Frank Cass, 1980), p. 159.

14. Meir Amit, "Secret Contacts Towards Peace," in Hezi Carmel, *Intelligence for Peace* (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 1998), pp. 283-317. [Hebrew]

15. Israel State Archives (hereafter "ISA"), 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Washington to Ministry, May 17, 1967. See also Gideon Rafael, *Destination Peace: Three Decades of Israeli Foreign Policy* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1981), pp. 136-137; Charles W. Yost, "How It Began," in *Foreign Affairs*, January 1968, pp. 304-320.

16. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Harman to Ministry, May 16, 1967; Eban to Harman, May 16, 1967. Though the minutes of Israeli cabinet meetings remain classified, some insight into their substance can be found in Eitan Haber, *Today War Will Break Out* (Tel Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 1987), pp. 147-152. [Hebrew]

17. Haber, *Today*, p. 153.

18. William J. Burns, *Economic Aid and American Policy Toward Egypt, 1953-1981* (Albany: SUNY, 1985), pp. 150-153.

19. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Argov to Tekoa, "The United States

and the Problem of Soviet Penetration into the Middle East,” May 14, 1967; Washington to Ministry, May 16, 1967.

20. ISA, 4078/4, Eban to Martin (Canada), May 19, 1967.

21. ISA, 4078/4, Harman to Eban, May 19, 1967.

22. ISA, 4078/4, Washington to Ministry, May 16, 1967; Washington to Ministry, May 17, 1967; Washington to Ministry, Conversation with Austin, Head of State Department Middle East Desk, May 18, 1967; Washington to Ministry, Meeting with Rostow and Atherton, May 21, 1967. Abba Eban, *Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes* (New York: Putnam, 1992), pp. 361-362.

23. Johnson letter to Eshkol, quoted in Eban, *Personal Witness*, p. 361, and in Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963-1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971), p. 290. See also William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1993), p. 28.

24. Theodore Draper, *Israel and World Politics: Roots of the Third Arab-Israeli War* (New York: Viking, 1967), p. 60.

25. Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, pp. 60-61.

26. ISA, 6444/4 North America, Telegrams, Tel Aviv to Ministry, May 20, 1967; Samir A. Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1987), pp. 88-89; BBC Daily Report, Middle East, Africa and Western Europe, No. A-1, May 14, 1967.

27. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Israel Government to Foreign Ministry, May 19, 1967.

28. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran. Israel Government to Foreign Ministry, Eban to Harman (“This is a most important telegram”), May 19, 1967. See also Eban, *Personal Witness*, pp. 360-361.

29. ISA, 4078/4 Washington to Foreign Ministry, May 19, 1967.

30. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Argov to Eban, May 18, 1967; Eban to Harman, May 19, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 20, 1967; Harman Conversation with Battle, May 21, 1967; ISA, 6444/6 North America, Telegrams, Ministry to Embassies, May 21, 1967.

31. ISA, 4078/4, Eban to Harman, May 19, 1967; ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War (Eban Files), Harman to Ministry, Meeting with Evron, Rostow, Davis, May 19, 1967.

32. Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 28-29; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, p. 291.

33. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Government of Israel to Foreign Ministry, Conversation between the Head of Military Intelligence and Ambassador Barbour, May 17, 1967; Eban to Harman, May 18, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 18, 1967; Washington to Ministry, May 19, 1967; Eban Memoranda, Conversation with Barbour, May 19, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 19, 1967; ISA, 6444/4 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies (describing Israel's secret contacts with Lebanese representatives on the subject of Syrian terror), May 19, 1967.

34. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Israel Government to Foreign Ministry, May 18, 1967.

35. Haber, *Today*, pp. 155, 161-162.

36. Henry M. Christman, ed., *The State Papers of Levi Eshkol* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1969), p. 88.

37. Parker, *Six Day War*, p. 281.

38. The closure of the Straits was implemented according to a plan prepared and often considered by Nasser in the early 1960s. See Parker, *Miscalculation*, pp. 90-91; Sadat, *In Search*, p. 172; Heikal, *Explosion*, pp. 514-519; Abdel Muhsin Kamil Murtagi, *Major-General Murtagi Attests to the Truth* (Cairo: Dar al-Watan al-Arabi, 1976), pp. 65-68. [Arabic]

39. Haber, *Today*, p. 165.

40. Robert Stephens, *Nasser: A Political Biography* (London: Penguin, 1971), pp. 479-480. Nasser's speech quoted in BBC Daily Report, Middle East, Africa and Western Europe, No. B-4, May 22, 1967.

41. Haber, *Today*, pp. 188-190.

42. Dan Kurzman, *Soldier of Peace: The Life of Yitzhak Rabin* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998), p. 204. In 1967 Israel's armed forces (active and reserve) totaled only 250,000 out of a population of about two million. Trevor N. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory: The Arab-Israeli Wars, 1947-1974* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), p. 337.

43. Haber, *Today*, pp. 163-169.

44. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with the United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Argov to Eban, May 18, 1967; Eban to Harman, May 19, 1967; Eban to Harman, May 20, 1967; Harman Conversation with Battle, May 21, 1967; ISA, 6444/6 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies, May 21, 1967. On May 24, for example, the Foreign Ministry's

Shlomo Argov met with American Ambassador to Israel Walworth Barbour: *Argov*: “The time element is of tactical military importance. The Egyptian deployment at Sharm el-Sheikh and in the south is new and not yet fully organized. Part of the force has not yet reached its destination.” *Barbour*: “Does this mean you people are going to jump the gun?” *Argov*: “This is all I have been instructed to transmit.” ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War, Prime Minister’s Office to Foreign Ministry, May 24, 1967.

45. ISA, 5937/30, Johnson Message to Eshkol, May 22, 1967; ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with United States regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran, Ministry to London and Paris, May 23, 1967. See also Eugene V. Rostow, *Peace in the Balance: The Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1972), pp. 259-260.

46. Or, as Rusk put it, “unleashing the Israelis.” *The Department of State during the Administration of President Lyndon B. Johnson, November 1963–January 1969*, vol. 1: *Administrative History*, pp. 220, 233, 245. The international convoy idea was first developed during the Suez crisis of 1956, albeit by the Israelis. It was never implemented. See USNA 974.7301/9-1056 Dulles Conversation with Eban; Public Record Office (British Archives), FO 371/11191501/2008: Shepherd Minute, October 28, 1956; ISA, 2409/10 Foreign Ministry Files: Eytan to New York, October 13, 1956.

47. ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War: Paris to Ministry, May 25, 1967, Protocol of Eban Meeting with De Gaulle. Eban explained Israel’s willingness to cooperate with the convoy initiative, but cautioned De Gaulle that “if the choice is between fighting and surrendering, we’ll fight.”

48. ISA, 4078/7 Foreign Ministry Files, Six Day War, Eban to Washington, Instructions for Conversations with Administration, May 23, 1967.

49. ISA, 4078/7 Foreign Ministry Files, Six Day War, Eban to Washington, Instructions for Conversations with Administration, May 23, 1967.

50. ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with United States Regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran: Washington to Ministry, May 23, 1967; New York to Ministry, Rafael Meeting with Goldberg, May 23, 1967.

51. ISA, 4078/4 New York to Ministry, May 22, 1967; Harman to Rafael, May 23, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 23, 1967. By the eve of Eban’s arrival, the misalignment of the Israeli and American positions had sparked considerable friction. Signs of the strain were evident in a memorandum fired off by Evron after yet another meeting with Rostow: “Maybe it wasn’t exactly according to diplomatic norms, but at the end of our conversation I had to tell him that, though we have agreed on the ultimate goal, the last few days had revealed serious differences over tactics.” In Evron’s view, the Americans bore some of the responsibility for the way things stood because of their early reticence to act in the face of Egyptian belligerence, despite

Israel's repeated warnings. "The reality today, unfortunately, proved we have been right from the start." ISA, 4078/4 Evron to Ministry, May 22, 1967.

52. Haber, *Today*, pp. 186-190. See Rafael, *Destination Peace*, p. 145; Parker, *Six Day War*, pp. 135-136. Abba Eban, *An Autobiography* (New York: Random, 1977), pp. 348-349; Yitzhak Rabin, *The Rabin Memoirs* (New York: Little, Brown, 1979), pp. 86-89; Robert Slater, *Rabin of Israel, A Biography* (London: Robson, 1993), p. 134.

53. ISA, 5937/30 Foreign Ministry Files, Six Day War: Summation of Conversation between Foreign Minister Eban and Undersecretary Rostow during the Evening of May 25, 1967. Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 38-39.

Ambassador Harman, however, was less optimistic about American intentions: "For the past twelve days the U.S. had undertaken the responsibility of restraining us from the protection of our rights and our security. The President himself had acknowledged that the blockade of the Straits was illegal and that what was concerned was a vital Israeli interest. They had held us back by giving us the impression that they were involved with us and would stand by us. They knew that we would ultimately have to fight to protect that vital interest, but as a result of their intervention and their assurances, we would now have to fight in very different military circumstances.... In the event, what they had told Eban this evening contained nothing definite and precise, contained no specific and binding timetable and, above all, contained no definite commitment in that the U.S. assumed a binding responsibility in regard to Aqaba." ISA, 5937/30 Note on Thursday Dinner at State Department, May 26, 1967. Harman's remarks were directed at Foy Kohler, a Soviet affairs expert; Lucian Battle, former U.S. ambassador to Egypt, then in charge of Middle Eastern affairs at the State Department; and Joseph Sisco, Director of UN Affairs at the State Department.

54. ISA, 5937/30, Washington to Ministry, Eban Memoranda on a Conversation with Rusk, May 26, 1967. See also Dean Rusk, *As I Saw It* (New York: Penguin, 1990), p. 385.

55. ISA, 5937/30, Eban to Eshkol, Meeting with McNamara and Chairman JCS Wheeler, May 26, 1967.

56. ISA, 5937/30, Eban to Eshkol, Meeting with McNamara and Chairman JCS Wheeler, May 26, 1967.

57. In the original notes of this meeting, which were prepared by the Americans and sent to the Israelis, this sentence was underscored. See note 58.

58. ISA, 5937/30, Evron to Ministry, Report on 1.5 Hour Meeting Between Foreign Minister Eban and President Johnson at the White House, May 27, 1967. The file, interestingly, also contains the official American protocol of the meeting—Secretary of State to U.S. Embassy, Tel Aviv—which fully confirms the Israeli version.

59. Douglas Little, "The United States and Israel, 1957-1968: The Making of a Special Relationship," in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, November, 1993, p. 578. For further references to the Eban-Johnson meeting, see ISA, 5937/30, Harman to Ministry, May 27, 1967; Rafael, *Destination Peace*, p. 145; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 514, n. 53; Eban, *Autobiography*, pp. 389-394. Eban would have two more meetings before leaving the United States—a second session with McNamara and a discussion with Goldberg in New York. Neither encounter revealed any change in the basic U.S. position.

60. Egyptian sources describe the planned attack in detail. See Murtagi, *Attests*, p. 81; Fawzi, *Three Year War*, pp. 93-94, 113-126; Baghdadi, *Memoirs*, p. 274; Heikal, *Explosion*, pp. 573-583. See also Haber, *Today*, p. 186.

61. 'Asam Daraj, *The Officers of June Speak: How the Soldiers of Egypt Died in the Aggression of 1967* (Cairo: al-Manar al-Jadid, n.d.). [Arabic] At the same time, Nasser ordered internal army security beefed up to prevent future intelligence breaches.

62. Haber, *Today*, p. 192.

63. ISA, 5937/30 Foreign Ministry Files, Six Day War: Harman to Ministry, May 27, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 27, 1967; Johnson Letter to Eshkol, May 27, 1967; ISA, 3977/22 Relations with the United States: Ministry to Washington, D.C., May 28, 1967.

64. ISA, 5937/30 Foreign Ministry Files, Six Day War: Evron to Foreign Ministry, May 29, 1967.

65. Christman, ed., *Levi Eshkol*, pp. 101-102; Hanoach Bartov, *Dado: 48 Years and 20 Days* (Tel Aviv: Ma'ariv, 1978), p. 94. [Hebrew]

66. Haber, *Today*, pp. 193-198.

67. For U Thant's moratorium plan, see Parker, *Miscalculation*, pp. 227-231; Rikhye, *Sinai Blunder*, pp. 67-79; Mahmoud Riad, *The Struggle for Peace in the Middle East* (New York: Quartet Books, 1981), p. 20; Rafael, *Destination Peace*, pp. 147-148; Brian Urquhart, *A Life in Peace and War* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), pp. 210-211; Gen. Odd Bull, *War and Peace in the Middle East: The Experiences and Views of a UN Observer* (London: Lee Cooper, 1973), pp. 109-111.

68. Avigdor Dagan, *Moscow and Jerusalem: Twenty Years of Relations Between Israel and the Soviet Union* (London: Abelard-Shuman, 1970), pp. 218-220.

69. Draper, *Israel and World Politics*, p. 98.

70. BBC Daily Report, Middle East, Africa and Western Europe, No. C-1, June 1, 1967; see also David Kimche and Dan Bawly, *The Sandstorm: The Arab-Israeli War of June 1967: Prelude and Aftermath* (London: Secker and Warburg, 1968), p. 101.

71. BBC Daily Report, Middle East, Africa and Western Europe, No. B-6, May 31, 1967. For descriptions of the border situation, see ISA, 6444/5 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies, May 29, 1967, May 31, 1967, June 3, 1967, June 4, 1967; ISA, 6444/6, Ministry to Embassies, May 30, 1967, May 31, 1967, June 4, 1967, June 5, 1967. See also Eban, *Autobiography*, pp. 402-403.

72. In 1967, the IDF had a total of 1,300 tanks and 286 military planes. Dupuy, *Elusive Victory*, pp. 183, 337. For IDF manpower totals, see note 42, above.

73. BBC Daily Report, Middle East, Africa and Western Europe, No. B-4, May 29, 1967.

74. ISA, 6444/6 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies, May 30, 1967; Ministry to Embassies, Intelligence Estimate, May 31, 1967. On Johnson's request for a conciliatory speech by Eshkol, see ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War, Evron to Ministry, May 27, 1967; Harman to Eban, May 28, 1967; ISA, 6444/6, Foreign Ministry to Prime Minister's Office, May 30, 1967.

75. ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War: Washington to Ministry, Harman Conversation with Rostow, May 27, 1967; Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 34-35; Haber, *Today*, p. 192; Rusk, *As I Saw It*, p. 385; Johnson, *Vantage Point*, pp. 295-296; Parker, *Miscalculation*, pp. 238-239; Parker, *Six Day War*, p. 218.

76. ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War, Ministry to Embassies, Intelligence Estimate, May 30, 1967; ISA, 6444/5 North America, Telegrams: Evron to Ministry, Conversation with Atherton, May 31, 1967; Washington to Ministry, Evron Conversation with Rostow, May 31, 1967.

77. ISA, 6444/5 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies, May 30, 1967; Ministry to London, May 30, 1967; ISA, 4078/4 Foreign Ministry Files, Contacts with US regarding the Closure of the Straits of Tiran, Harman to Ministry, Conversation with Rostow, May 30, 1967.

78. ISA, 6444/5 North America, Telegrams: Ministry to Embassies, May 31, 1967.

79. Ezer Weizman, *On Eagles' Wings* (New York: Macmillan, 1997), p. 219; Haber, *Today*, p. 183.

80. Haber, *Today*, pp. 204-212.

81. Uzi Narkiss, *Soldier of Jerusalem*, trans. Martin Kett (London: Valentine Mitchell, 1998), pp. 202-204; Bartov, *Dado*, p. 96; Haber, *Today*, pp. 244-246.

82. Oral history with Meir Amit, February 9, 1999.

83. Haber, *Today*, p. 218; Parker, *Six Day War*, pp. 124-125.

84. These were former U.S. Ambassador to Egypt Charles Yost and Texas oilman Robert B. Anderson, ISA, 6444/5 North America, Telegrams: Washington to Ministry, Evron Conversation with Rostow, May 28, 1967; ISA, 6444/5, Geva to Ministry, May 29, 1967; ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War, Washington to Ministry, May 31, 1967; Heikal, *Explosion*, pp. 680-684; Parker, *Miscalculation*, pp. 235-241; Quandt, *Peace Process*, p. 47.

A former Treasury Secretary under Eisenhower, Anderson had served as the President's emissary in an abortive attempt to mediate an Egypt-Israel accord in 1956. See Michael B. Oren, "Secret Efforts to Achieve an Egypt-Israel Settlement Prior to the Suez Campaign," *Middle Eastern Studies*, 26:3, 1990, pp. 352-370.

85. ISA, 5937/30 Secret Memoranda Prior to the Six Day War, Evron to Ministry, May 31, 1967, Conversation with Krim; Quandt, *Peace Process*, pp. 46-47; Eban, *Autobiography*, p. 405; Brecher, *Decisions in Israel's Foreign Policy*, p. 420. See also Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis*, pp. 160-175; Parker, *Miscalculation*, pp. 119-120; Parker, *Six Day War*, pp. 149-150; Laura Kalman, *Abe Fortas: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale, 1990), p. 301.

86. Haber, *Today*, pp. 219-221.