

The Toxic Legacy of 1967 Six-Day War

A war that began the longest military occupation of modern times and shaped the current world order



THE OVERTON WINDOW

TODAY, June 5, marks the 53rd anniversary of the 1967 war between Israel and its Arab neighbours Egypt, Jordan and Syria. In the six days of conflict, Israel captured the Sinai and Gaza Strip from Egypt, the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan, and the Syrian Golan Heights—all of which, except for the Sinai, it still illegally occupies.

In fact, Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza is the longest in modern times, maintained predominantly with the help of narrative control. For example, during the 50th anniversary of the Six-Day War, the *New York Times* wrote: "This year marks half a century since the Arab-Israeli War of 1967 in which Israel defied annihilation by its Arab neighbours and also came to rule over Palestinian Arabs in captured areas, including in the old city." This characterisation of Israel's role in the conflict (like in countless others) with its Arab neighbours (especially in comparison) is a perfect example of "falsifying history", according to Jewish scholar and author Norman Finkelstein.

In truth, Israel was not facing any threat in 1967. And "the entire story of the danger of extermination" was, quite simply, a fabrication used "to justify the annexation of new Arab territory" by Israel, as Mordecai Bentov, a member of its then wartime government, told Israeli newspaper *Al-Hamishmar* on

April 14, 1971. As such, the Arab states were really the ones facing an actual threat—that of Israeli expansionism.

Given this reality, on November 4, 1966, Egypt and Syria signed a "defence agreement" in the hope of discouraging Israel from going on the offensive against either country, knowing that the other would be forced to intervene as per the agreement. It was with this knowledge that Israel began to set its trap for Egypt's President Gamal Abdel Nasser by goading cross-border shootings with Syria. The provocations reached their peak on April 7, 1967, when Israeli Mirages shot down six Syrian MIG-21s. Nasser could either come to the defence of his ally under attack by Israel (as promised), or dishonour the agreement and lose his credibility as leader of the revolutionary Arab world.

Nasser chose to honour the agreement. He put two Egyptian divisions into the Sinai next to Israel's border and partially closed the Straits of Tiran, which gave Israel the *casus belli* that it had been looking for.

In an interview published by *Le Monde* on February 28, 1968, Israeli Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin said this: "I do not believe that Nasser wanted war. The two divisions which he sent into Sinai on May 14 would not have been enough to unleash an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it." Likewise, General Matityahu Peled, Chief of Logistical Command during the war and one of 12 members of Israel's General Staff, wrote in an article that came out on June 3, 1972, in *Le Monde*: "While we proceeded towards the full mobilisation of our forces, no person in his right mind could believe that all this force was necessary to our 'defence' against the Egyptian threat.

This force was to crush once and for all the Egyptians at the military level."

Lastly, to sum it up, this is what Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin had to say in 1982: "In June 1967, we had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches did not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us... We decided to attack him."

The war itself may have lasted only six days, but the occupation that

includes the remaining 22 percent of Palestinian land that was conquered by Israel during the war is now in its sixth decade. While Palestine's freedom struggle has continued in many different forms, so has Israel's brutal repression of Palestinians. On the scale of "morality", this is "the greatest issue of our time", as described by the great

Nelson Mandela.

On the global and regional scales, few modern conflicts have had as big an impact in shaping the future of the world as the Six-Day War. According to US academic and activist Thomas Reifer, the war of 1967 sounded the "death knell of pan-Arab nationalism", and led to "the rise of political Islam" and to "Israel's emergence as a US strategic asset, with the United States sending billions of dollars... in a

the routing of the Egyptian-Syrian-Jordanian alliance during the war of 1967. And, interestingly, it was after this destruction of Arab resistance by Israel that the US started calling Israel its strategic asset.

Once Israel proved its fighting prowess in the 1967 war—during the same time when the US was struggling in its war against Vietnam—the US understood the value of having Israel "enforce" US hegemony in the resource-rich Middle East, especially since its anti-war movement had just exposed the risks of depending solely on direct US military intervention. And thus began Israel's integration with US power, which has become so deeply entrenched today.

Meanwhile, in the absence of any meaningful Arab resistance, which the US and Israel had prevented from rising, using all means necessary, it was political Islam that filled the vacuum. Ironically, one of its most noticeable roles so far has been that of an adversarial scapegoat, used by the US and Israel in their pursuit of hegemonic ambitions and frequent interventions.

The workings of these factors and others have ensured that the world order today remains very similar to the one shaped by the war of 1967. And that includes (other than the same geopolitical intrigues) failure of global organisations and the larger international community to right the wrongs done during and after the Six-Day War, and to ultimately replace the world order of "might is right"—which the war had cemented—with something more just.

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Eresh Omar Jamal is a member of the editorial team at *The Daily Star*. His Twitter handle is: @EreshOmarJamal



COURTESY: THE STATE OF ISRAEL GOVERNMENT PRESS OFFICE

Israeli armoured troop unit entering Gaza during the Six-Day War, on June 6, 1967.

The Fire Next Time!

US racism and its bitter fruits



"God gave Noah the rainbow sign,
No more water,
the fire next time!"
— (pre-Civil War era US Negro spiritual song)

A horrified world is watching as the US goes up in flames. An appalling racist murder by police has triggered protests in more than 140 US cities. Rioting, looting, cities ablaze, police brutality, night curfews in major cities—it's all happening. The federal administration is ratcheting up tensions by unleashing the US military.

Where the heck are we, really? This is beginning to feel like some tin-pot dictatorship about to unravel. US President Donald Trump teargassed peaceful protesters to do a phony photo op, holding a Bible in front of a church. This sacrilege has rightly outraged church officials.

In his 1967 book *"The Fire Next Time,"* James Baldwin, one of the most perceptive, excoriating critics of racism in America, asks the US to address the consequences of America's original sin—the oppression of African Americans since they first landed here.

Racism, he writes, "compromises, when it does not corrupt, all the American efforts to build a better world—here, there, or anywhere... Color is not a human or a personal reality; it is a political reality. But this is a distinction so extremely hard to make that the West has not been able to make it yet."

Baldwin issues a stark warning: "If we do not now dare everything, the

fulfilment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!"

Race relations in the US is a maddeningly uneven mix. Massive strides in race relations sit side-by-side with ghastly inequities.

The racist Jim Crow laws are long gone. Social fraternisation is total. Near-total black voter

passed in the 1940s. Southern racist Democrats ensured that domestic workers and farm workers, both overwhelmingly African American, were excluded. A racist history of excluding blacks from home loans has deprived them of the basic building block of creating wealth in this country—home ownership.

The murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis by police on May 25, which triggered the recent protests, was

In February in coastal Georgia, a white former police officer and his son chased Ahmaud Arbery, and shot him to death in a resulting altercation. Yet for two months, nobody was even arrested. It took national publicity for the state to step in and arrest the two men.

It's no wonder massive protests demand justice.

And while the circumstances are tragic, there are some green shoots of hope. The protests are largely peaceful. White Americans, mostly young, are present everywhere. New York Police chief Terence Monahan "took a knee"—the traditional symbolic protest against police brutality on African Americans—as have police chiefs in Portland, Oregon, and the California cities of Santa Cruz and Napa.

There is, however, a darker side. The US has a history of massive racial protests degenerating into carnage.

Here's a chilling statistic: In the 1992 riots in south-central Los Angeles, Korean American businesses sustained an estimated loss of USD 500 million, ruining struggling, hard-working immigrants who built these businesses over decades of backbreaking work.

My own hunch is, the vast majority who engage in looting and arson are common thugs who wouldn't know a cause even if it bit them on the backside.

Being peaceful at a time of justified outrage is hard but the rewards are commensurate. Take Martin Luther King, Jr., who battled for civil rights against a far more vicious, racist opposition. He remained assiduously non-violent. Some pooh-poohed King as soft. King won, because his non-violence robbed his racist opponents of an excuse to denigrate his movement.

It's no different today. Arson and

looting won't address the grievances of today's protesters, but they are guaranteed to provide a distraction that their detractors will embrace gleefully. California offers a historic cautionary tale: As the student protests against the Vietnam War turned violent in the 1960s, Republican governors like Richard Nixon and Ronald Reagan rode on the white middle-class backlash to launch a long reign of law-and-order, conservative politics.

I can almost see the more gung-ho protesters' lips curl in disdain: Who are you to tell us what to do, they snarl contemptuously.

Touché.

Don't take my word for it. Here's somebody whose moral authority is beyond reproach. This is the brother of George Floyd, the slain African American man in Minneapolis.

Praying at the intersection where his older brother died, Terrence Floyd recently told supporters over a loudspeaker: "If I'm not over here blowing up stuff, if I'm not over here messing up my community—then what are y'all doing? Nothing, because that's not going to bring my brother back at all."

"So let's do this another way. Let's stop thinking that our voice don't matter and vote... because it's a lot of us and we still going to do this peacefully."

There you have it. Protest by all means. But organise. And vote.

Remember, it will take time. Take heart from what King once said: "The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice." It was Obama's favourite quote, and he knew a thing or two about how to win in politics.

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Ashfaq Swapan is a contributing editor for *Siliconeer*, a digital daily for South Asians in the United States.




Protesters kneel in front of the police during a demonstration over the death of George Floyd in the Hollywood area of Los Angeles.

PHOTO: AFP


disenfranchisement in the South is a thing of the past. The US elected its first black president in 2008. Yet African Americans continue to lag appallingly. From home ownership to mass incarcerations to health outcomes, African Americans are in a deep hole.

There are historic reasons. America's historic social security law was

preceded by two more recent killings of African Americans under questionable circumstances. In March, police entered the apartment of Breonna Taylor in Louisville, Kentucky, and shot her dead in a raid for suspected drugs. No drugs were found. For weeks, nothing happened. Then public outcry forced the state to investigate.



QUOTABLE
Quote



RAY BRADBURY
(1920 - 2012)
American author.
*We are cups,
constantly and
quietly being filled.
The trick is, knowing
how to tip ourselves
over and let the
beautiful stuff out.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

1 Field sounds
5 Water channel
11 Lotion additive
12 Fat pig
13 Ore source
14 Little dears
15 Kennel club requirement
17 Compass dir.
18 Crew member
22 T choice
24 Catch
25 Will Smith biopic
26 Tiny taste
27 Wind indicators
30 Some sculptures
32 Uncasy feeling

33 Had lunch
34 Two-striper
38 Lighter fuel
41 Freshener scent
42 Annual tennis tourney
43 A fan of
44 Loathe
45 Historic times

DOWN

1 Scout's base
2 "I cannot tell—" biopic
4 It's believing
5 Ship pole
6 Solitary sorts
7 Incite
8 Mamie's mate
9 Animation

frame
10 Hosp. sections
16 "My word!"
19 Itinerant
20 Bullalo's lake
21 Workout count
22 Hot flow
23 Ladd of "Shane"
28 Get away
29 Go pieces
30 Snooze
31 Perfect place
35 Monthly bill
36 Poker payment
37 Some summerd babies
38 Future flower
39 Try out
40 Young one



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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	R	M	S		T	I	P	J	A	R
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BEETLE BAILEY

BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES

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