

Jordan's Epic 6-Day War Mistake

TEACHER'S GUIDE

Additional Resources

Questions/Learning Activities



SECTION 1: ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

1. MICAH GOODMAN, *CATCH 67*

At this point, however, we must ask a question that might sound childish, but is, in fact, critical: Who started the war? Who fired the first shot? Israel fought on multiple fronts in the Six-Day War. The IDF engaged the Egyptian army in the south and the Syrian army in the north. This is why the government of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol warned King Hussein to stay out of the war. But the Jordanian monarch was unable to withstand the pressure from his Arab allies, and he joined the Egyptian and Syrian assault, attacking Israel on day one of the war... Jordan, however, made a mistake: its entry into the war did not lead to Israel's collapse, but to its expansion. At the end of the war, Israel found itself with East Jerusalem in its hands as well as the Judean Desert and the hills of Samaria. This much is an indisputable historical fact: Judea and Samaria were conquered not in an act of Israeli aggression but in an act of Israeli defense.

2. MICAH GOODMAN, *CATCH 67*

Would it have been appropriate for Israel to return the territories seized from Jordan when defending against Jordanian aggression? To turn the question on its head: Was an aggressor state entitled to demand back the territory it had lost as a consequence of its aggression? The answer to these questions, I believe, is clear. A world in which aggression bears no cost is a dangerous world indeed because it is a world in which bullies face no risks. A hostile power defeated in a war that it has initiated is clearly not entitled to overturn the results of the war.

3. FRANCINE KLAGSBRUN, *GOLDA MEIR AND THE NATION OF ISRAEL*

Eshkol had promised Jordan's king, Hussein, that if he stayed out of the war, Israel would not attack his lands. But on the first day, Hussein's troops began shelling Jerusalem and the Jewish settlements on the border of Jordan and Israel. Israel struck back and by Wednesday, June 7, all of Jerusalem had fallen into its hands.

4. SARI NUSSEIBEH, *ONCE UPON A COUNTRY*

In the West Bank, King Hussein had never wanted the war, and if it had been up to him, the No Man's Land dividing the city would have stayed in place until the end of time. But he felt he had to put up a halfhearted show of resistance, as a prophylactic measure against the inevitable Arab charge that he was cooperating with the enemy. Symbolic or not, the shots fired by Jordanian soldiers went against the silent understanding the king had had with the Israelis. The Israelis took the opportunity to decimate the Jordanian army, capturing the West Bank, Gaza, along with nearly a million Palestinians... The reaction throughout the Arab world was stunned silence.

5. ALAN BAKER, "THE LEGAL BASIS OF ISRAEL'S RIGHTS IN THE DISPUTED TERRITORIES,"
[HTTP://JCPA.ORG/TEN-BASIC-POINTS-SUMMARIZING-ISRAELS-RIGHTS-IN-JUDEA-AND-SAMARIA/](http://jcpa.org/ten-basic-points-summarizing-israels-rights-in-judea-and-samaria/)

Upon Israel's taking control of the area in 1967, the 1907 Hague Rules on Land Warfare and the Fourth Geneva Convention (1949) were not considered applicable to the West Bank (Judea and Samaria) territory, as the Kingdom of Jordan, prior to 1967, was never the prior legal sovereign, and in any event has since renounced any claim to sovereign rights vis a vis the territory.

6. MICHAEL OREN, "DID ISRAEL WANT THE SIX DAY WAR,"
[HTTP://AZURE.ORG.IL/ARTICLE.PHP?ID=313](http://azure.org.il/article.php?id=313)

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...

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... 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.

7. DANIEL GORDIS, ISRAEL: A CONCISE HISTORY OF A NATION REBORN

In 1994, Jordan and Israel began serious negotiations designed to end the state of war between the two countries. King Hussein had officially renounced any claims to the West Bank, so there were no insurmountable issues still dividing the two countries. When Shimon Peres, who was then serving as minister of foreign affairs, flew to Jordan to meet with King Hussein, he remarked that the flight only took fifteen minutes...but it crossed a gulf of forty-six years of hatred and war.

8. DANIEL GORDIS, *ISRAEL: A CONCISE HISTORY OF A NATION REBORN*

Ever since Israel's Declaration of Independence had extended "our hand to all neighboring states and their peoples in an offer of peace and good neighborliness," most Israelis had been raised on the belief that someday, somehow, the two warring sides would set their swords aside and usher in a new era for the Middle East. It happened with Egypt, and then Jordan too had made peace with Israel. But the Palestinians, it seemed, would settle for nothing less than Israel's disappearance.

SECTION 2: QUESTIONS/LEARNING ACTIVITIES

1. On the one hand, the term "occupation" is a contentious word, and many Israelis dispute that Israel's presence in the West Bank is an "occupation" in the legal sense. One of the reasons it might not be an occupation, which is noted above, is because Jordan renounced claims to the territory. On the other hand, Micah Goodman notes that in lived reality, "The Palestinians are a nation that lives under occupation. The conclusion is that the territories are not occupied, but the Palestinian people are." Do you think that this nuanced distinction between occupation of land and occupation of people is a constructive way to analyze the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? Why or why not?
2. There is some evidence that Jordan did not become involved in the Six-Day War for the purpose of winning spoils as much as it was to save face, and not be a "sell-out" to the Arab world. Nusseibeh and others make that point clearly. To what extent do you think a nation's motives are important in choosing to go to war, and do you think motives should be connected to the peace process?
3. With the victory of the Six-Day War, Israel was on its way to settling what many call "Greater Israel," and the religious Zionist establishment, led by Rabbi Tzvi Yehuda Kook, was ecstatic after the war. Rabbi Kook said, "Thanks to God, the prophetic visions are unfolding before our very eyes. There is no more room for doubt or any question that might rattle our joy and our gratitude to the redeemer of Israel... The real redemption is already taking place in the advance of the settlement enterprise in the Land of Israel and in the resurrection of the state on its soil." The Kotel (Western Wall), Hebron and other holy sites were now in Israel's control as a result of Jordan's decision to enter the war.
Debate - do you think Israel was ultimately happy when Jordan made this decision to enter the war, or do you think Israel would have preferred Jordan to stay out of it?
4. Although they were once enemies—and countries who are responsible for the death of thousands of Israelis—Jordan and Egypt are now two of Israel's biggest allies in the Middle East. What do you think this sea-change says about the nature of geopolitical foes? To what extent are the peace deals with Egypt and Jordan analogous to the Palestinians, and how might the situation with the Palestinians be different?
5. Pauline Baynes famously said, "Believe what you like, but don't believe everything you read without questioning it." When reflecting on the outbreak of the war in 1967 and who you perceive as the aggressor, what about the history of the war do you find yourself questioning and wanting to understand better?