

Even with everything else that was going on, the anniversary this week of the Six Day War was present in media and in the Jewish communal world. There were dozens of convocations, seminars and webinars featuring various figures from the right and left speaking to this anniversary, as well as a variety of academics and Israeli political and intelligence figures. I participated in several webinars and read some of the variety of published articles, covering the bases from AIPAC to Peace Now. In the course of this anniversary I was exposed to some Israeli historians whose work I had not previously read and to a few new observations on the war. Whether it was the best thing that ever happened to the Jewish people, a miracle of Biblical proportions, or the origin of all of Israel's present difficulties, or something in between, the Six Day War certainly reshaped the experience both of Israelis and Palestinians. I was well acquainted with the impact the war had on Israel, both initially in the euphoria of the early 1970's and long term in relation to the ongoing debate about the territories, but I was less aware of how much of what we assume was the story of the Palestinians from forever, was actually shaped by this war.

Originally a tool of the Egyptians, the PLO only became its own independent voice after the war, as the Palestinians despaired of the Arab states as their protector

and as Pan-Arabism was discredited. It also created a momentum in terms of the inhabitants of Israeli occupation, in a way that the refugees in Arab countries were never allowed to be.

Many writers see in the Six Day War the seeds of the later peace with Egypt and Jordan and rapprochement with the PLO, though I think that in doing so they overlook the profound effect on both sides of the Yom Kippur War.

But for me, in our current context, the most interesting things that I learned over the last couple of weeks, concerned the role of the Soviet Union and its disinformation campaign of the time. Some of this was found in an article by Ronen Bergman, senior correspondent for military and intelligence affairs at Yediot Achronot, whose work also appears in the New York Times, and relates to double agents whose stories have now become accessible.

In 1967 the Soviet Union was involved in active measures to exert influences, by misleading others, and undermining and weakening U.S. allies. In response to 1967 gains in Vietnam, the USSR was determined to weaken the US in the Middle East and to increase their own role by increasing Egyptian and Syrian dependence on Moscow. They also hoped to compel Egypt to remove its forces from Yemen,

which was annoyed to them, and to slow down Israeli nuclear development of which they were aware.

What did they do? On May 13th they told Sadat, a top official in Nasser's government, that they had top secret intelligence that Israel was concentrating its forces on the northern border, in anticipation of an attack on Syria. This was not true and they knew it was a lie.

At the time the view of Israeli intelligence was that the chance of war was low. Syria was busy with internal strife and Egypt was tied up in Yemen.

Sadat shared this information with Nasser, while the KGB was also supplied the Egyptians with corroborating evidence through other fake intelligence.

As a result on May 15th Nasser ordered the Egyptian army to march into Sinai and demanded the removal of the UN peace keeping forces. He declared the straits of Tiran closed to Israeli shipping. These three actions made the war inevitable.

The Israelis were shocked. They attempted to use their double agents to convince the Soviets to lessen tensions. There is a wonderful incident in which Prime Minister Levi Eshkol received the Soviet Ambassador in the middle of the night, while still wearing his pajamas, and tried to convince him to come with Eshkol,

right then, immediately, to the northern border, to see that the Israelis have not amassed their forces there. He would not make the trip. Though the Soviets did write President Johnson to demand that he insist that Israel not attack, they did nothing to persuade Nasser to withdraw and continued feeding him false information through the beginning of the war.

The consequences were of course the opposite of what they had hoped for—rather than bringing the Middle East to the brink of a war which would increase their clients dependence, the war itself was a display of the weakness of Egypt and Syria, of their Soviet arsenal, and in the case of Syria in particular, the extent to which war with Israel was a much lower priority than maintaining the government. The Syrian's had fewer casualties than the Israelis in the Six Day War, 450 Syrians died as compared to 679 Israelis and over 10,000 Egyptians. This is because the Syrians immediately pulled its tanks and soldiers back to Damascus, afraid of an attack on the government by its own people.

This is just part of a larger picture in which the movement in the USSR and the US from foreign aid to weapons sales, contributed to the strengthening of the army in the countries of the Middle East and the weakening of governments.

There is much else to talk about regarding the Six Day War, its effect on World Jewry, especially Soviet Jews and American Zionism, but fortunately this year presents us with other anniversaries, especially the 100th anniversary of the Balfour Declaration, so I am sure we will have time to talk about that as well.