Where Would Israel Be if the Six Day War Had Not Happened?

Udi Dekel

The results of the Six Day War substantially changed Israel's strategic situation. Prior to the war, Israel was a small democracy with Western values. The Israeli economy was in a recession due to the ideological positions of its socialist leadership, which was slow to adapt a modern economy to the rapid growth in the private sector. The country identified as part of the Western world, and its hostile Arab neighbors had not accepted its existence as a Jewish state in the heart of the Arab-Muslim region. Israel was secular in character but respected its religious sectors.

The war broke out on the morning of June 5, 1967, following a gradual process of deterioration on three fronts. On the Syrian border, territorial issues and the struggle over water sources had been left unresolved since 1948, together creating mounting tension. In the West Bank, which was under Jordanian control and responsibility, hostilities with Palestinian Fedayeen—guerilla fighters who operated against the Israeli territories—were increasing and reached a peak with the IDF retaliation operation in Samu in November 1966. On the southern front, Egypt's president Gamal Abdel Nasser—then considered the leader of the Arab world—had threatened to close the Straits of Tiran. The rapid process of deterioration caused the Israeli public and its leadership to have a renewed sense of an existential threat.

The success of the Israeli air force's preemptive aerial strikes on the air bases of the Arab countries neighboring Israel, especially Egypt, in Operation Moked marked the beginning of unprecedented military successes leading

to a decisive simultaneous victory on three fronts and within only six days. At the end of the war, the State of Israel had tripled in size and included all of the territory between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean, as well as the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. The war moved Israel to the top of the global agenda and strengthened its image as a regional military superpower. From a small democracy fighting for its existence and its freedom, Israel had become the regional Goliath.

Israel's success in the Six Day War led to a feeling of military superiority, fixed conceptual thinking, and an underestimation of the enemy's military capabilities. This was the main reason for the surprise of the Yom Kippur War, a little more than six years after the spectacular victory of 1967. Alongside the strategic and military changes as a result of the war, Israel underwent a different kind of transformation when it became an occupier and ruler of the Palestinian population. Only the Interim Agreement with the PLO (1995) and the disengagement from the Gaza Strip and northern Samaria in 2005 transferred control of more than 95 percent of the Palestinian population to the Palestinian Authority (although the daily routine of most of the Palestinians in the territories is still affected by Israeli rule).

Over the years, many books and articles have been written about the young State of Israel's military success in the Six Day War. Many discuss Israel's situation prior to the war and the events leading up to it. Some of them deal with the results of the war and the narratives that have become rooted in Israeli society and in the international community. This essay is unique in that it attempts to hypothesize where Israel would be today, and, in particular, what its strategic situation would have been had the Six Day War not occurred. Since science has not yet found a way to examine "what would have been," this essay is a conceptual exercise and focuses on three main strategic factors during the last fifty years: the relations between the State of Israel and the Palestinians, the peace agreement between Israel and Egypt, and the peace agreement between Israel and Jordan.

The Lack of a Strategic Plan for the Day After

The euphoria following the victory in the Six Day War was combined with perplexity. This was reflected in the lack of thinking about the possible implications of the war's results, whether expressed in government deliberations or in statements by Israeli leaders. General Aharon Yariv, then head of the Intelligence Directorate, described a "historic discussion" that

was held in the office of Defense Minister General Moshe Dayan on June 12, 1967, two days after the war. The topic was "How to organize things now?" The guidelines were as follows: "expanding the territory of the state, ensuring the status of a Jewish Jerusalem, routine security activity, protection of water sources, additional living space if possible—without any addition, or a minimal one, of Arabs." According to Yariv, another principle that was discussed was "peace and direct negotiations, [which was] a tactic but not a goal" because "at that time, we already said that there would be no peace."[1]

According to Yariv and others, there was essentially no strategic plan for the day after the war. The political leadership did not succeed in translating and promoting the impressive military win into advancing peace agreements, and the IDF was given the main role of administering the West Bank and the Gaza Strip ("the territories"), without examining in-depth the significance and the consequences of the encounter between an army and the Palestinians under occupation. The statements of Prime Minister Levi Eshkol reveal the euphoria following the capture of parts of the Land of Israel that had been cut off from the state since 1948 and, in parallel, the desire not to close the door on the chances of peace by creating permanent facts on the ground. Eshkol was also concerned about the issues relating to Israel's international status ("We do not operate in a vacuum"), the demographic danger—which dictated that the proportion of Arabs in the population of the state should not be increased—and Jerusalem ("For Jerusalem, we are ready to die").[2] The duality in his words is symbolic of the lack of clarity that characterized Israel at the time vis-à-vis its achievements in the war and how to leverage them to strategic assets.

At the government meeting held on June 18–19, 1967, Tourism Minister Moshe Kol disagreed with the chairman of the Ministerial Defense Committee, Prime Minister Eshkol, who proposed that the Jordan River would be Israel's security border. Kol claimed that no such decision had been reached and

---

1   "The Six Day War, testimony of the Head of the Intelligence Directorate, General Aharon Yariv," January 1, 1972, IDF, History Department, IDF and Defense Archives, [Hebrew], https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-z1DlVC2Cow.

2   Yemima Rosenthal, ed., *Levi Eshkol, the Third Prime Minister—A Selection of Documents from his Life (1895–1967)* (Jerusalem: Israel State Archives, 2010), p. 5 [Hebrew], http://www.kotar.co.il/KotarApp/Viewer.aspx?nBookID=95199637#604.223.6.default.

that it would lead to the creation of a binational state.[3] The determined opposition of some of the ministers to returning any territory on the one hand and the desire among the others to avoid having to rule over one and half million Palestinians on the other hand, placed the government in a state of disagreement regarding the content of the territorial proposal to be submitted to Jordan. In the end, the government chose not to make any decisions regarding its future policy and decided, as an interim stage, to establish an occupation regime until a decision was reached regarding the future of the West Bank territories.

In contrast, the government decided in a vote of ten to nine that Israel would not annex the Golan Heights and Sinai and instead stated that "Israel proposes peace agreements with Egypt and Syria, which will include security arrangements, based on the international border and the security needs of Israel."[4] The government discretely conveyed its decision to the United States, which passed it on to Egypt and Syria; however, they did not respond positively. At the end of August 1967, the leaders of the Arab nations met in Khartoum in Sudan for a summit meeting. On September 2, they passed a resolution that came to be known as the "Khartoum no's": No to negotiations with Israel, no to peace with Israel, and no to recognition of Israel. This resolution led to a change in Israeli policy and reduced its willingness to show flexibility and concessions based on the formula of "land for peace" and security arrangements in Sinai and the Golan Heights.

Peace with Egypt: A Strategic Achievement

The Six Day War generated conceptual and practical processes of change in Egypt, as it had an intensifying and conflicting effect on its approach to the conflict with Israel. On the one hand, the war helped to strengthen the Arab-Israel conflict and its centrality. The reality that developed as a result of the Arab defeat enhanced Egypt's engagement with the conflict; it reinforced the Egyptian citizens' connection to the conflict and strengthened the feeling that their cause was a just one. The new reality also deepened Egypt's commitment to continue the struggle against Israel, bolstering its refusal to accept the

---

3   Government meeting, June 18, 1967, Paragraph 553, Israel State Archives, 8164/7-A [Hebrew].

4   Government meeting, June 19, 1967, paragraphs 561 and 563, Israel State Archives, 8164/8-A [Hebrew].

existence of the State of Israel and nurturing its animosity and desire for revenge while fueling the demonization of the Jews and the Zionists. At the same time, the war also led to self-criticism and accelerated the decline of the pan-Arab ideology—which had prevailed during Nasser's regime— due to having totally failed to realize the objectives that it set for itself and its accompanying hopes. These developments led Egypt to reexamine its fundamental uncompromising approach to the conflict with Israel, which, in the end, resulted in exchanging land for peace as the preferred route to take. This policy was implemented only after the Yom Kippur War.[5]

The processes of conceptual change following the Six Day War as well as the results of the Yom Kippur War were basically components of the same process. Together, they had a major impact upon the considerations behind Egypt's decision to sign a separate peace agreement with Israel. Thus, in regards to territory, Egypt sought to regain control of the territories it had lost in the Six Day War, especially the Sinai Peninsula with its oil resources and tourist sites. From an economic perspective, the war with Israel had exhausted the Egyptian economy, while a peace agreement was perceived as a necessary condition for shifting the national resources toward rehabilitating Egypt and constructing it as a thriving and advanced country. From a military position, the achievements of the Egyptian army in the Yom Kippur War—of surprising the IDF and crossing the Suez Canal in the order of battle of two armies, which were recognized as having erased the humiliation of the 1967 defeat—bolstered the public support of President Anwar Sadat and enabled him to initiate path-breaking political processes. At the same time, the combination of the Egyptian defeat in the Six Day War, together with Israel's rapid recovery on the battlefield in the Yom Kippur War, reinforced Egypt's realization that continuing the military struggle against Israel had no benefit. Finally, on the political level, Sadat's desire to improve relations with the United States, in the hope that it would force Israel to withdraw to the 1967 borders and would provide Egypt with economic assistance, strengthened his resolve to achieve a peace agreement. The desire to strengthen cooperation with the United States rendered the

---

5   Yehoshafat Harkabi, ed., *The Lesson of the Arabs from their Defeat* (Tel Aviv: Am Oved, 1972), pp. 12–17, 35 [Hebrew]; Yossi Amitai, *Egypt and Israel—A View from the Left* (Haifa University and Zmora-Bitan, 1999), p. 163 [Hebrew]; Shimon Shamir, *Egypt under Sadat: The Search for a new Orientation* (Tel Aviv: Dvir, 1978), pp. 188–189.

goal of peace with Israel, its closest ally, more attractive and even a vital national necessity from Egypt's perspective.[6]

It can be said that peace with Egypt—the leader of the Arab world—was made possible only after it had restored its self-respect following the "October 73 victory" and President Sadat became determined to reach an agreement with Israel in order to achieve the more important goal of returning Egyptian territory captured in 1967. Therefore, it is difficult to assume that Egypt would have chosen a strategy of peace with Israel without the continuum of events that began with the Six Day War, continued with the Yom Kippur War, and culminated with the signing of the peace agreement twelve years later.

Since the signing of the peace treaty with Egypt, Israel has experienced two wars in Lebanon, two Intifadas, and a series of military confrontations in the Gaza Strip, in addition to the two Gulf wars and the Arab Spring revolution at the regional level. These developments all have led to a prolonged lack of stability. In addition, Egypt and Israel both experienced domestic shocks as a result of the assassination of President Sadat in 1981 and Prime Minister Rabin in 1995 respectively. Despite these events and their implicit dangers, the peace treaty between the two countries has persisted, primarily due to Egypt's understanding that it does not have a military option against Israel. This understanding is rooted first and foremost in the results of the Six Day War.

Peace with Jordan: An Achievement and a Missed Opportunity

The direct diplomatic contacts between Israel and the Hashemite family began at the end of the First World War, continuing through the British Mandate period, and after Israel and Jordan's independence. The contacts even continued during the War of Independence. Some of the channels of communication were secret while others were public and took place under the auspices of the UN.

Prior to the Six Day War, King Hussein was forced to close ranks with the Arab world and join the Arab coalition against Israel led by Egypt's

---

6   Shamir, *Egypt under Sadat*, pp. 77–79; Avraham Sela, *The Decline of the Arab-Israeli Conflict: Middle East Politics and the Quest for Regional Order* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 153; Neill Lochery, *The Difficult Road to Peace: Netanyahu, Israel and the Middle East Peace Process* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 2000); Yoram Meital, *Egypt's Struggle for Peace: Continuity and Change 1967–1977* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), pp. 133–134.

President Nasser.[7] Following the war, the Jordanian strategy focused on the return of control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem to the Hashemite Kingdom. At the same time, the war accelerated the rise of the Palestinian national movement, which became a threat to both the Hashemite royal family and the State of Israel vis-à-vis Jordan's status in the West Bank and Jerusalem as well as the very legitimacy of the Hashemite Kingdom's rule and the stability of Jordan as a state.[8]

The "Jordanian option" was especially relevant at that time, particularly following the expulsion of the PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) from Jordan after the Black September events in 1970 and the federation plan of King Hussein in March 1972, which was designed to strengthen the Jordanian connection to the West Bank and Jerusalem at the expense of the PLO. However, the Israeli government, then led by Golda Meir, did not respond favorably to the strategy.[9] After the Yom Kippur War, the "Jordanian option" was removed from the agenda for all practical purposes, following the decision of the Arab Summit in Rabat in October 1974, recognizing the PLO as the only legitimate representative of the Palestinian people, and in 1977 when the Likud attained power, which strengthened the belief of Greater Israel and the claim that "Jordan is Palestine." Jordan and the PLO for their part tried to advance a "framework for common action" based on the principle that the Palestinians would realize their right to self-definition as part of a confederation with Jordan, but after these efforts failed, King Hussein announced in a speech in February 1986 that cooperation with the PLO had terminated.[10]

In 1987 King Hussein and the Israel's Foreign Minister Shimon Peres attempted to revive the "Jordanian option." In a secret meeting that took place in London, the two signed an agreement that the Palestinians would achieve self-determination within a Jordanian framework. The underlying

7   Zeev Bar Lavi, *The Hashemite Regime 1949–1967 and Its Status in the West Bank* (Tel Aviv: The Shiloh Institute, Tel Aviv University, 1981) [Hebrew].

8   D. Dishon, ed., *The Middle East Record, 1969–1970* (Jerusalem: Israel Universities Press, 1977).

9   Announcement of Prime Minister Golda Meir in the Knesset, *Divrei HaKnesset* (1972), p. 294 [Hebrew].

10 M. Klein, *The End of Dialogue: Jordan-PLO Relations 1985–1988* (Jerusalem: Davis Institute for International Relations, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 29–66 [Hebrew].

idea behind the agreement was that Jordan would again rule the Palestinian population in the West Bank in some format while in parallel it would sign a peace agreement with Israel. Furthermore, it was agreed between King Hussein and Foreign Minister Peres that the Jordanian delegation would represent the Palestinian issue at an international summit and PLO representatives would not participate. Peres, who initiated the summit, received approval from Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir of the National Unity Government, but Shamir ultimately objected to its results, for fear that an international conference would impose a solution on Israel that was contrary to its interests, as he saw it.

The withdrawal of Israel from the London agreement, the Palestinian threat to the regime of the Jordanian royal family, and especially the outbreak of the first intifada (December 1987) led King Hussein in 1988 to revoke the proposal for connecting the two banks of the Jordan and to announce the severing of ties between them. This also included retracting the demand for Jordanian sovereignty in the West Bank and dissolving any legal or administrative ties between Jordan and the PLO. In doing so, King Hussein expressed Jordan's wish not to pay the price for a resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and essentially stated Jordan's support for creating an independent Palestinian state in the West Bank. The signing of the Oslo Accords between Israel and the PLO in 1993 enabled King Hussein to reveal the secret meetings he had held with Israel and to open the way to achieving a formal peace agreement between Israel and Jordan, which was signed in October 1994.

Israel's relations with the Hashemite royal family were independent of the results of the Six Day War, since they had existed before the war and continued to exist afterwards, although undoubtedly the Palestinian issue directly influenced them. The Six Day War, however, led to a series of developments that eventually enabled a peace agreement between Israel and Jordan. Israel, however, had missed an opportunity—even before the Six Day War, but also immediately following it—to recognize Jordanian sovereignty in the West Bank and thus to create the conditions for realizing the "Jordanian option," as part of fulfilling the Palestinians' national aspiration in a confederation, federation, or any other political framework upon which the two sides decided. Nonetheless, the results of the Six Day War placed the Palestinian problem and the Palestinians' right to self-determination squarely in the focus of the international arena. In this new situation that

had been created, the Palestinians presumably would not have agreed to a deal that would have realized the Jordanian option without their approval.

The Palestinian Problem: The Worsening "Entanglement"

In order to hypothesize about what would have been the fate of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict if the Six Day War had not erupted and ended the way it did, it should be asked whether the Palestinian problem would have received as much attention as it did if it had not been for the war and the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Another question in this context is whether Israel would have entered talks and negotiations with the Palestinians if it had not been for the war and its territorial outcome.

Would the Palestinian problem have received its current level of attention if not for the occupation of the West Bank? All of the territory that makes up Israel/Palestine, from the Mediterranean to the Jordan River, came under Israeli control as a result of the Six Day War. In the Palestinian narrative, this situation exacerbated the historical problem, since the entire territory of Mandate Palestine had fallen under control of the State of Israel. At the same time, overnight, Israel began to administer directly and independently the Palestinian inhabitants of the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. From Israel's point of view, the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip became the potential address for a future peace treaty.

In the early days following the war, the Israeli government created an inter-ministerial committee for political contacts in the occupied areas (the Committee of Four) and also the West Bank Committee (whose members were the heads of the Mossad and the Israel Security Agency, IDF generals, and senior officials from the foreign ministry). In July 1967, the members of the Committee of Four stated in a report that an agreement with King Hussein was possible, and they urged the Israeli government to prioritize and reach a peace treaty with Jordan without delay. They recommended that until the signing of an agreement with Jordan, Israel should administer the West Bank as a separate administrative and economic unit. In August 1967, the West Bank Committee submitted a number of options to the government, from annexing the West Bank to various types of arrangements with Jordan, and ending with the establishment of an independent Palestinian state. Neither these measures nor a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian

people were included among possible initiatives prior to the Six Day War, and those discussed after the war were not adopted by the government.[11]

Officials who were involved in formulating the aforementioned ideas claim that they contended with a policy determined by Prime Ministers Levi Eshkol and Golda Meir, based on firmly holding onto the territories without giving up any of it and without agreeing to anything but direct negotiations with the Arab countries for a permanent status agreement, which would include peace. In practice, the government rejected any serious efforts to advance a settlement and clearly preferred continuing the current situation rather than taking any sort of initiative, out of a sense of comfort and a lack of pressure as a result of the sweeping victory. There are those who believe that Israel hung onto various excuses (such as the negative position of the Arab countries at the Khartoum summit) and did not leverage its military triumph into a political achievement.[12]

The protocols of government meetings during that period show that holding onto the territories from the beginning resulted from a lack of consensus within the Israeli governments as to the future of the territories and the map of the state's final borders. This was due to the weakness of the leaders who were unwilling to make difficult decisions, for political and ideological reasons, and also because of the feeling of achievement and euphoria following the 1967 war. A short while after the Six Day War, the government adopted the approach that security would take precedence and that it was not peace but rather the strategic depth of the territories and the power of the IDF that would guarantee Israel's national security.

The Six Day War reinforced the broad opposition to recognizing the Palestinians' right to self-determination and separate political rights and solidified the feeling that establishing an independent Palestinian entity in the territories of the West Bank and Gaza Strip was not justified. During the two decades after the war, the Palestinian national movement operated in Jordan, Lebanon, and Tunisia, while the Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip remained outside the circle of political thought and action. The continuing occupation, however, led to a grassroots uprising of the

---

11 Shlomo Gazit, *Suddenly in a Trap—30 Years of Israeli Policy in the Territories* (Tel Aviv: Zmora-Bitan, 1999), pp. 142–143 [Hebrew].
12 Tom Segev, *1967—Israel Changes its Look* (Jerusalem: Keter, 2005), pp. 538–547 [Hebrew].

Palestinians in the territories in December 1987. The first intifada, which started from below and was unconnected to the PLO, changed the reality. It essentially caused Israel and the international community to realize that the state of occupation without a political plan could not continue and a few years later—following the victory of the regional and international coalition over Saddam Hussein's Iraq—led to a regional peace process and the adoption of the "land for peace" formula (the Madrid Conference, the multilateral talks, and the talks in Washington with the Jordanian-Palestinian delegation).

It can be assumed that if Israel had not captured the West Bank and Gaza Strip in 1967, the situation that preceded the war would have continued. In other words, Jordan and Egypt would have controlled these territories and the Arab-Israeli conflict would have centered around the fundamental questions that were created in 1917 and reshaped in 1948; that is, the status of the land of Palestine as a whole, the international recognition of the right of the Jewish people to a national home in the Land of Israel and the existence of the State of Israel ("a representative of Western colonialism"); Israel's control of territory as a result of the War of Independence, which well exceeded the borders of the UN Partition Plan of 1947; and the future of the Palestinian refugees in the Arab countries. This means that the Palestinian problem would have existed in a similar degree to the way it developed, although perhaps it would have taken different directions.

There are two main implications in the Palestinian context that can therefore be attributed to the Six Day War: the transformation of the Palestinian issue from a problem of the Arab world to one that should be solved by Israel; and the understanding that the territorial solution applies only to the territories that Israel captured in 1967.

Would we have reached a peace process with the Palestinian people if not for the Six Day War? The Palestinian leadership was shattered and dispersed in all directions after 1948. Only a decade later did young Palestinians start to organize within the framework of various organizations (such as the Fatah movement and the organizations that later constituted the PLO). These demanded a solution of the Palestinian problem and searched for ways to persuade the Arab leaders "to liberate Palestinian land by force from the Zionists." In 1964, at the first summit meeting of the Arab leaders, the PLO was established as a political umbrella with the goal of keeping Palestinian politics and all that was related to the Palestinians under the firm control of

the Arab states, primarily Egypt. In 1969, following the Six Day War and the occupation of the West Bank, the Fatah organization, then headed by Yasser Arafat, took control of the PLO and has led it since.

It can be assumed that even if the Six Day War had not occurred, the Palestinian problem would not have vanished. The PLO would have gained in strength and also would have used every possible means (including engaging in terror activity and dragging the Arab countries into a war with Israel) in order to keep the issue on the agenda of the Arab world and the international community. The existence of the Palestinian refugee camps in the Arab countries did not allow the Arab leaders to ignore the problem. The refugee camps themselves served as a point of recruiting young Palestinians to the terror organizations, which for their part challenged the stability of the Arab regimes—such as Jordan and Lebanon—and also maintained the hostility toward Israel and threatened its security. In the geopolitical circumstances that prevailed in Israel before 1967, it is difficult to assume that Israel, the Palestinians or the Arab countries would have initiated a process to resolve the conflict between them, since the discussion at that time centered on the 1948 issues, and Israel did not, in that reality, have any strategic assets with which to negotiate (such as "land for peace"). Only in 1988—twenty-one years after the Six Day War—at the meeting of the Palestinian National Council in Algiers, and after the expulsion of the PLO from Jordan (in 1970) and from Lebanon (in 1982), did the organization accept the formula that any talks with Israel would be based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338, which meant that talks would be limited to negotiating on the territories captured in 1967.[13]

If, prior to 1967, conditions had developed for a peace agreement that would have led to the creation of a Palestinian state, this would not have been the result of a bilateral process (Israeli-Palestinian) but rather a multilateral one, with the participation of Egypt and Jordan—perhaps even as the leading participants—and with the backing of the Arab world. The likelihood that a peace process of this type would have happened was low, however, due to the feeling of security at that time within the Arab world even before the Six Day War, and due to Israel's feeling of being under existential threat within its then narrow borders. It is also assumed that Egypt and Jordan would have preferred to maintain control over their territories. Egypt would

---

13   *Shu'un Filastiniyya* 188 (November 1988): 2-6 [Arabic].

have wanted to continue to pose a threat to Israel and to keep the Palestinian problem on the margins, while Jordan would have wanted to ensure its control over the Palestinians in a way that would have prevented any shocks to the Kingdom, given the demographic reality and primarily to ensure control over the Temple Mount (Haram al-Sharif), which has been the most important religious asset of the Hashemite dynasty.

It can also be assumed that the status quo that took shape after the UN Partition decision would not have endured over time if the Six Day War had not occurred. This was due to the inability to reach an agreement between Israel and the Arab world in general and with the Palestinians in particular and also because of the increasing burden of the Palestinian problem facing the Egyptian and Jordanian regimes, given the popular support for Palestinian rights to self-determination in the Arab world. Therefore, it can be assumed that sooner or later a war would have broken out against Israel, as indeed occurred in 1967.

The conditions that arose following the Six Day War and the increasing burden of the occupation on Israel, as well as the developments in the regional and international spheres, created a framework for mutual recognition between the State of Israel and the PLO. This was implemented in the Oslo Accords in 1993, the Israeli-Palestinian Declaration of Principles, and at a later stage in the interim agreements and in the attempts to reach a permanent status agreement between Israel and the PLO, as the representative of the Palestinian people. The basis for negotiation for all of these attempts was the territories captured by Israel in 1967, and not the territories of Mandate Palestine.

Conclusion: The Time was not Ripe to Exploit the Strategic Opportunity

It is difficult to guess what Israel's situation would have been if the Six Day War had not occurred. Undoubtedly, the war elevated Israel's status to that of a regional military superpower and led to the recognition that Israel could not be defeated militarily by an Arab coalition, which was reinforced by the Yom Kippur War. Nonetheless, it should be mentioned that the infrastructure for Israel's economic, scientific, and technological achievements was already in place prior to the Six Day War and continues to be the platform that will carry Israel into the future.

The result of the war created strategic opportunities for Israel that had not previously existed, primarily the chance to sign a peace treaty with Egypt, the leader of the Arab world. In the longer term, these opportunities also provided the foundation for the signing of a peace treaty with Jordan, which, together with Israel, shares the "burden" of the Palestinian problem.

It is reasonable to assume that the conditions that prevailed prior to the war would have led to a large-scale military confrontation whose results would not necessarily have resembled the situation on June 11, 1967. The outbreak of war with a different timing and less optimal conditions for Israel and without carrying out a preemptive strike could have presented a major military challenge to Israel (such as the country being cut in two or the capture of parts of its territory). The Six Day War provided Israel with strategic depth that enabled it to handle even the surprise attack of the Yom Kippur War.

The Six Day War gave added momentum to the Palestinian liberation movement, which took the reins from the Arab countries in the struggle against Israel and located itself at the center of the Arab-Israeli conflict, until it was transformed into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. From Israel's point of view, its feeling of power following the war and its possession of the entire Land of Israel caused its governments to refrain from exploiting strategic opportunities in order to resolve the Palestinian problem within the context of the "Jordanian option," which theoretically would have existed even without the Six Day War but became more practical following it. In addition, the way in which Israel managed the conflict after 1967 anchored the idea that Israel is responsible first and foremost for solving the Palestinian problem and that any Israeli-Palestinian agreement would be solved within the boundaries of the Land of Israel, between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River. Israel did not succeed at expanding the circle of responsible partners nor the territorial expanse for solving the Palestinian problem in the peace treaties that it signed with Egypt and Jordan and in its actions following them.

If Israel had not captured the territories as it did in the Six Day War, and if the territories had not remained under Israel's control for many years, in addition to the accompanying developments—in particular the creation of the settlements—it is reasonable to assume that Israel's status would be more stable than it is today. It would not be negatively branded as an apartheid state that violates human rights and blocks Palestinian rights to

self-determination, while the issue of Israel's legitimacy as a Jewish state would be of less concern.

If Israel continues to hold on to the territories captured in 1967, while maintaining a lack of clarity of its intentions in the future and its indecision to solve the Palestinian problem, Israel will miss the strategic opportunities standing before it to consolidate its position in the world as a technological superpower in the areas of defense, hi-tech, and cyber. Holding onto the territories would also undermine Israel's ability to fortify its regional status and to achieve recognition as a democracy with the ability to maintain constructive relations with its neighbors in the Middle East.

From the internal-social perspective, the religious, socioeconomic, and ethnic polarization assumingly would have developed in Israel even without the Six Day War. Nonetheless, it likely would have been less pronounced that it is today, as it is fed by the negative byproducts from ruling over another people and the ideological polarization with respect to the future of the Palestinian problem and the territories.

Fifty years after the Six Day War, the time has come to dispel the ambiguity regarding the State of Israel's intentions of how to solve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future of the occupied territories. Furthermore, Israeli society needs to determine the rules of the game about strategic decision making regarding the main issues on the agenda: separation from the Palestinians, a two-state solution, or annexation of the territories and the establishment of a one-state reality.