



Six Days of War

Michael B. Oren

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Though it lasted for only six tense days in June, the 1967 Arab-Israeli war never really ended. Every crisis that has ripped through this region in the ensuing decades, from the Yom Kippur War of 1973 to the ongoing *intifada*, is a direct consequence of those six days of fighting. Michael B. Oren's magnificent *Six Days of War*, an internationally acclaimed bestseller, is the first comprehensive account of this epoch-making event.

Writing with a novelist's command of narrative and a historian's grasp of fact and motive, Oren reconstructs both the lightning-fast action on the battlefields and the political shocks that electrified the world. Extraordinary personalities—Moshe Dayan and Gamal Abdul Nasser, Lyndon Johnson and Alexei Kosygin—rose and toppled from power as a result of this war; borders were redrawn; daring strategies brilliantly succeeded or disastrously failed in a matter of hours. And the balance of power changed—in the Middle East and in the world. A towering work of history and an enthralling human narrative, *Six Days of War* is the most important book on the Middle East conflict to appear in a generation.

Six Days of War Details

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From Reader Review Six Days of War for online ebook

Steve Kettmann says

My review published in the San Francisco Chronicle in 2002:

A necessary light

'Six Days' goes far to help sort out Mideast conflict's tangled web

Reviewed by Steve Kettmann

Sunday, July 28, 2002

Six Days of War

June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East

By Michael B. Oren

OXFORD; 446 PAGES; \$30

It's a natural impulse to seek distance when confronted with a seemingly hopeless spiral of violence. That's what President Bush tried to do with Middle East diplomacy early in his administration. So much can go wrong. So little can go right. Why take chances?

That's also true, morally and intellectually, for many other Americans, whose capacity for imaginative empathy has long since been eroded by the parade of horrors flashing on their television screens from Israel and the West Bank. Details are so hard to follow. Haunting images almost rule out comprehension.

But a little context can go a long way in offering some insight -- especially for a general reader. There's much of that to be had in "Six Days of War," Israeli scholar Michael Oren's workmanlike, richly detailed study of the 1967 war that established Israel's reputation as a formidable military power.

The book offers some much-needed relief from fatalism. If anything emerges with any clarity in reconsidering the details of what Israelis call "The Six Day War" and Arabs try not to call anything at all, it's the minute distance that can separate one course of events from another.

Chance and the vicissitudes of human nature both played major roles in the stunning drama that unfolded in June 1967. Israel attacked Egypt with devastating success, eventually occupying all of Sinai, and humiliated both Jordan and Syria, moving into Gaza, the West Bank and the Golan Heights.

"Capriciousness characterized the process leading to the outbreak of the war," Oren writes. "The last-minute cancellation of Operation Dawn -- Egypt's one chance to do to Israel what Israel would soon do to Egypt [that is: attack first] -- poignantly illustrated the process' randomness.

"Yet even that chaos had its context. Only within the unique milieu of the Arab-Israeli conflict could elements as diverse as Syrian radicalism and Israeli politicking, inter-Arab rivalry and America's preoccupation with Vietnam, Soviet fears and Egyptian aspirations, combine in a chain reaction culminating

in war."

Oren, a military historian who earned his doctorate at Princeton, does better with straight narrative than with summing up what it all means. His analysis can have a tossed-salad feel to it. But here the point is clear enough, and it's important for anyone trying to come to terms with recent Middle East history.

Looking back, it's easy to conjure an air of inevitability; what happened had to have happened. But that's often an illusion. June 1967 did not have to transpire the way it did -- and neither did July 2000. That was when Bill Clinton did his best to push Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat together at Camp David. Just how narrowly the effort failed may never be known, but the bracing insider account Oren offers here of 1967 vividly demonstrates how real events on the ground are often only poorly understood, either by contemporary observers, or by history.

The human details are what linger longest. Oren dug into a variety of source material -- a long bibliography lists books in English, French, Spanish,

Hebrew, Arabic and Russian -- and found many tasty tidbits.

Describing the buildup of tensions that preceded the war, and the at times bizarre events, he tells of the Egyptian press going big with a story about an Arab Legion defector named Capt. Rashid al-Hamarsha, who allegedly confessed to "masterminding subversion" in Syria.

"Jordan dismissed al-Hamarsha as a Zionist spy, 'in liaison with an Israeli belly dancer named Aurora Galili or Furora Jelli,' and then produced its own deserter," he writes.

The hapless U.N. leader U Thant, quick to withdraw his forces and create the conditions for war, puts off an emergency visit to Cairo for three critical days until "his horoscope said it was propitious for him to travel."

Egypt's Gamal Abdul Nasser, the charismatic enigma at the center of the drama, greets Jordan's King Hussein for a key private meeting, and then summons Ahmad al-Shuqayri, the first PLO chairman, who was "wearing a rumpled Mao-style uniform and looking disoriented." Nasser informs Shuqayri that he's to leave for Jordan immediately with Hussein. "Then he turned to Hussein: 'If he gives you any trouble, throw him into one of your towers and rid me of him! '"

Later, after days of ludicrous Egyptian lies over the airwaves about Israeli forces being routed, its army slips into full, ignominious retreat -- in shocking, every-man-for-himself fashion. "Maj. Gen. Uthman Nassar, for example, commander of the 3rd Infantry Division, told his officers that he had an urgent meeting in headquarters, packed up, and left," Oren tells us. "He was later seen frequenting cafes in Cairo."

Soviet Ambassador Sergei Chuvakhin privately informs Abba Eban that his government has decided to sever relations with Israel, "then, to the foreign minister's astonishment, the Soviet ambassador burst into tears."

Oren accomplishes much, much more here than bringing alive his important tale with the kind of texture so essential to avoid falling into a gray recitation of troop strengths, battle readiness or political backdrops. But as in "War and Peace," the dynamics of battle stand up on the page much more readily when the reader's capacity for surprise -- or wonder, or outrage -- has been coaxed into high alert.

Most of all, by painting his portrait with such care and thoroughness, Oren reminds us of a basic fact: The question when it comes to Israel-Arab dynamics does not always have to be about being biased against one

or the other, but rather about seeing how both sides have suffered and sacrificed, and both urgently deserve something other than endless iterations of warfare and conflict.

Steve Kettmann has written for the New Republic, the New York Times and Salon.com.

Schoolplus says

This is a very interesting book about Israel-Arab war. Because our generation witnessed this war and not looking at it only in retrospect it is especially interesting for me. I still clearly remember all propaganda Soviets conducted at that time... I remember what was written at that time in Soviet newspapers and what was broadcasted...

In a century I believe the military historians will compare this war with the most famous wars in all times. The book has a lot of not “everyone knows” details, and gives the info gotten from all possible sources and languages. It is a fascinating story (I mean six day war) written seriously and objectively.

Recommended for all especially for those who are interested to know more facts about in Israeli-Arab conflict. Especially interesting in a view of a current Israel war with Palestinian terrorism. Especially interesting in a view of a current Israel war with Palestinian terrorism. In 1967 and 2009 wars Arabs were defeated completely and in both cases announced and celebrated the great victories

Dave says

Egyptian and Syrian military incompetence and the sense that Israel's back was against the wall; these were my impressions of the war as it was acted out. Ambassador Oren's narrative confirms those vague impressions, but he also provides the detail to flesh out the story. Nervous breakdown, fog of war, big-power politics and numerous other features are added to provide a clear picture of this uniquely short war that is still going on. With maps handy (I used MapQuest's terrain and satellite maps) it is an easy read that provides a full background, gives just enough operational detail and connects the events of June, 1967 to the ongoing Arab-Israeli contest. I recommend it.

Jonfaith says

I read this in a flash a few years ago. It isn't a social history nor is it investigative. It yields a basis for an ideology. I accept that. I just read this review <http://www.uslliberty.org/orenbook.htm> and it upset my indifference. What can I say? I'm exhausted.

Eric says

This is a wonderfully concise, well-written history of the war between Israel and Egypt, Syria, and Jordan that lasted only six days in June 1967. The Arabs got pounded, and Israel seized the West Bank, Gaza, the Golan Heights, and the Sinai Peninsula. The war, though won by Israel, also brought that country decades of

additional strife that continues to this day. It also made the Arab nations more determined to wipe out the Jewish state.

Oren has written a fair history, with all sides presented with no apparent bias or judgment. He gained access to previously undisclosed material, so he has records of internal meetings with all the political parties involved.

And there are lots of them. The Middle East doesn't exist in a vacuum. Other nations have stuck their noses into the region. In this case, the Soviet Union sided with Egypt and Syria, but only to an extent, never daring to get involved in the actual fighting. The U.S. played a similar role with Israel, pledging undying support but no military involvement. So while outside actors did their best to shape events, the real fighting and dying were done by Israelis, Egyptians, Syrians, and Jordanians.

It's true the Arab armies were routed, but they did fight hard, especially Jordan's troops in the West Bank and Syrian soldiers on the Golan. The Israelis could have easily conquered Cairo, Damascus, and Amman, but such actions would have brought the Jewish state solid international condemnation, including from the United States. It must be very frustrating for Israel - its enemies fight for its destruction, and it cannot retaliate in kind. And somehow, the Israelis are considered the bad guys by many people.

If you wish to gain a greater understanding of the Middle East, and find out why they still fight over there, reading this book would be a great start.

Joeji says

New review: Aug 09

Since I have been spending the last year reading about Israel and Palestine, I may now class this book as shameless and apologetic when it comes to Israeli militarism. My review below is shameless in many ways and I'm a bit embarrassed about it. Oren says he is giving everyone equal treatment, but how can you be Israeli ambassador to the US and not be biased?

This book supports Israel myths about itself and its military might and does little to acknowledge that the 1967 war was part of a catalyst of pain and suffering of the Palestinian people. With the Israeli silence surrounding criticism of their own history, you wonder what this "comprehensive book" left out and for what purpose.

Old review:

Though the author says that he sets out to provide an objective history of the Six Day War, there are two glowing descriptions: He's Jewish and Israeli. And though, again, objectivity was the goal, why did I find myself, someone unsure of how he falls on the Jews for Israel scale, thinking, "Woo! Way to go Israel!" in response to the military narrative.

Yes, it is a good book, and it is probably as objective as possible, eliciting some sympathy for King Hussein and Nasser, while loathing/loving Moshe Dayan--that is, you get to see how it ran from the inside. You get to see read about the involvement of the USSR and USA (especially ambivalent) and Israel's plans for the Palestinians as it became apparent that they would end up with the West Bank and Gaza.

Spoiler Alert!: The Israelis were wary of harming mosques on the way into East Jerusalem, handed the Dome of the Rock over to Muslim authorities ASAP, and wanted to make a federated Palestinian state autonomous to Israel. Of course, still not something that Yasser Arafat would accept; just not impossible enough. And there are always your people who think that the West Bank should be annexed and the Palestinians ousted, but thank goodness these people were on the Israeli margins in 1967. Israel is seen best as a thriving democracy, shown through its fractious cabinet, its loathing of the prime minister, and its fear of international sanction, while the fatal error of the Arab countries was their inability to estimate Israel as such. After the Egyptians lost their air force in the first few hours, it was reported on Cairo radio that the army was penetrating Israel and laying seige to Tel Aviv. Even Nasser was a victim of his own system; no one told him the truth until it was much too late.

A fast read. Finished in less than a week.

Mahlon says

Michael B. Oren's Six Days of War is probably the most comprehensive book published on Israel's 1967 conflict with the Arab world to date. Painstakingly researched and scrupulously fair, Oren's strength is dealing with the causes and effects of the war. He discusses every diplomatic move and counter-move that the belligerent countries and their superpower allies (the U.S. and U. S. S. R.) made, and how those decisions impact Middle East policy to this day. Oren is noticeably weaker when discussing the actual tactics of the war, choosing to view the military units as pieces in a diplomatic chess game rather than giving the reader a sense of what the soldier on the ground was feeling, although he does do a fantastic job in describing the climactic battle for Jerusalem.

Six Days is absolutely essential reading for anyone who wants to understand the politics of the region.

Philipp says

Prior to my work on the 1967 war, I believed the politics in the Middle East—as elsewhere in the world—were the product of rational decision making, a reflection of cogent analyses on the part of Arab and Israeli leaders. Today I know differently. Of all the insights I gleaned from my research—the extent of Egyptian war planning, for example, or the depth of Israeli fears—none altered my thinking more than the realization that politics in the Middle East are, more often than not, random and unpredictable, arbitrary in their course and potentially explosive in their outcome.

This quote is from an interview in the appendix of my edition, an interview with the author, but it summarises the book well - a relatively even-handed description what went down before, during, and after the Six-Day War which arguably shaped the Middle East into the form it is today. It's a great read - lots and lots of dialogues taken from the archives, great if you're into politics or large scale plans:

The Big Lie had boomeranged. Instead of prodding the Soviets to come to the Arabs'

assistance, it impelled them to pursue a cease-fire. The Arabs, in turn, were incensed. By the third day of the war, Nasser was not only talking in terms of Western collaboration with Israel, but of an implicit Soviet-American understanding not to come to blows in the Middle East. For the Soviets, the only way out of this vicious circle was to ignore the Arab dimension for now, and focus their attention on Israel.

The only little criticism is that while Oren extensively uses archives to summarise what the Arab nations, Israel and the US were doing, there's very little detail on what the Soviet Union was doing behind the scenes. *That* would have been interesting. Anyway, if you want a concise, very readable and interesting summary of what went down you can't go wrong with this one.

Jerome says

An engaging, comprehensive and balanced day-by-day history of the Six Day War that puts it into the context of the wider Cold War, with more of a focus on the war's politics and diplomacy than the battles.

Oren ably presents Nasser's role in the lead-up to the war, describing his role in forcing the UN out of the Sinai and to illegally closing the Tiran strait to Israeli shipping, which amounted to an act of war by every observer. Oren then covers Israel's search for an effective and legitimate military response and its efforts to bring both the US and the Soviets on board, and the dilemmas of the US, then involved in its own war in Vietnam, and the Israeli government, which was loath to risk losing US support. Oren then describes how Israel's preemptive attack created a chain reaction that drew in Jordan and Syria and forced the Israelis to improvise on a daily basis, and how Nasser's own officers were often unwilling to present him with the full picture, (at one point with Egyptian troops retreating and at the same time claiming to be advancing on Tel Aviv).

Oren describes how Israel's objectives evolved along with the situation and how its ultimate objective was always to eliminate the threat posed by the Arab armies, with very little discussion of occupying either Jerusalem or the West Bank, and how in spite of this the Israelis opened a front on the Syrian border for both military and political reasons, and how the decisions to take East Jerusalem, the West Bank, and the Golan were made arbitrarily and on the spot by commanders on the ground. Oren also argues that Israeli policies toward the Palestinians were largely reactive and contingent.

Other times, it seems like Oren downplays Israel's refusal to negotiate with Egypt or Syria, and he also seems to downplay Israel's pre-war military activity (which he calls "activism" but what the Arab states saw as provocations) Some more discussion of these events would have helped. And contrary to what the title suggests, there is little on the war's aftermath and impact: the displacement of the Palestinians gets only a single paragraph, for example (Oren refers to it as an "exodus" rather than expulsion) although Oren does cover the Palestinian guerrilla attacks. There is little on the Arab states' postwar attempts to negotiate a settlement with Israel on the basis of an Israeli withdrawal from the captured territory. The coverage of the tactical level is a bit confusing, and there are also a few annoying typos.

Still, a great history of the war, with strong coverage of the politics and strategy.

Matt says

My actual, literal, fake-wood-and-screw bookshelf has two shelves devoted to unread books that I have accumulated, and continue to accumulate at a fantastic pace. (Thanks a lot, cheap white wine and Amazon's one-click shopping!)

The downside to my book hoarding is that it is used against me, every time my wife shows up in a new pair of shoes or boots or moccasins. Yes, moccasins. And whenever we get into an argument, she stands near the shelf with a sheath of matches. Cackling. (So, that might be an exaggeration).

The upside to having a minor bookstore's worth of never-perused material is that I'm often prepared when a sudden mood strikes. Instead of going to a library or signing into Amazon, I can just go to my bookshelf and – *voila* – instant gratification.

Recently, spurred by current events, I got an itch to learn about Middle Eastern-Israeli relations. Fortunately for me, and unfortunately for my wife, child, and anyone else who depends on my paycheck, I had several titles on hand, including Martin Gilbert's massive *Israel: A History*.

Feeling a bit less ambitious, I chose instead *Six Days of War* by Michael Oren, about the so-called Six Day War fought from June 5 to June 10, 1967. After all, the Middle East is a lot of history – bloody, tragic, comic-tragic – to swallow. I thought it best to start with only six days.

The chronology of the war gives this book its framework. Oren starts with a series of contextual chapters: one chapter devoted to a sweeping overview of Israel and the Arabs; another chapter more tightly focused on the catalysts of the war; and a third given over to the unfortunate mechanics (a delayed telegram, a gambler's gambit, and fear, fear, fear) that triggered open conflict.

These opening chapters, especially the first, were the driest reading for me. And also the most confusing. I'm a bit of a newbie to Middle Eastern history, while Oren writes with an authoritative assurance that his readers have a bit of background knowledge. The names, especially, from all sides, were unfamiliar to me, and with the exception of a few men (Dayan, Nasser), the personalities never really popped off the page.

Some of my confusion, of course, comes from the fact that this troubled area of the world is a complicated mess. The precipitant of the Six Day War was border incursions along the Syrian-Israeli frontier. Palestinian guerrillas used Syria as a base of operations. Israel accused them of harboring terrorists, etc. etc. Eventually, based on false reports that Israel was going to attack Syria, Egypt's leader, Gamal Abdel Nasser moved troops into the Sinai and ejected the UN observers stationed there. He also closed the Straits of Tiran. I could attempt to relate more, but maybe it's best if you just re-listened to Billy Joel's *We Didn't Start the Fire*. It's all there, more or less.

Importantly, all these regional tensions played out against the backdrop of the Cold War. The USSR backed Syria and Egypt, while the US stood behind Israel. The little guys did their best to draw in the big guys, while the big guys did their best to rein in the little guys, while still giving them lots of guns to play with.

Eventually, hemmed in on three sides (Syria to the north, Jordan to the west, Egypt to the south), and with no assurance of American help, Israel attacked.

The first day of war (each day gets its own chapter) was decisive. The Israeli Air Force destroyed the

Egyptian Air Force while it was on the ground, while her ground troops routed the Egyptians army under Abdel Amer (who lied about his defeat for so long that one has to wonder at his mental stability).

Meanwhile, King Hussein of Jordan decided to enter the fray on Egypt's behalf. Thinking this mostly a bluff, Israel gave him the chance to back off. Hussein did not. So Israel went on the offensive there as well, bagging Jerusalem in the process. Towards the end of the six days, with the west and south secure, Israel captured the Golan Heights – defended by Syria – for good measure.

All this information is conveyed in what can only be termed drab, unadorned prose. There is precious little consideration given to illuminating characters, and a paucity of vivid, first-person accounts. The tactical aspects of the war is conveyed academically, as though this were a staff ride rather than a general history. Oren makes sure to tell you the movement of each battalion; he does not always make sure to explain why that mattered.

There are maps, to be sure, and detailed maps. Unfortunately, each map tries to be everything at once, so there are arrows – each a different shade of black or gray – covering the page in an attempt to capture every movement during all six days.

It should probably be noted that Michael Oren is now the Israeli Ambassador to the United States. I didn't detect any overt bias, other than the bias of fact (that Israel won, the Arabs lost). I'm sure that won't matter to people with strong opinions. Those with a pro-Palestinian bent will find this volume a Zionist screed; those who are pro-Israeli hawks will undoubtedly conclude that Oren did not go far enough in lauding the IDF. The average reader, like me, will probably find very little in this understated and un-inflammatory work to get passionate about at all.

The subtitle to Oren's work is *June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East*. That second part, the whole *making* of the Middle East, is mostly implied. Oren goes only cursorily into the nuts-and-bolts of the postwar echoes: new territorial boundaries; land for peace; settlements; Arab embarrassment; Israeli hubris; and the seeds of the Yom Kippur War.

As an avowed history nut, there is a very real reason I mostly avoid reading about certain topics, such as Vietnam and the Middle East. The reason is this: history is a hobby. If I want to be stressed-out and anxious... well, I already am. History, then, is my escape. It's soothing to slip into the a distant time period, such as the American Civil War. The stakes were just as high. The death just as real. The same passions that grip us now gripped us then. But every person there is a ghost.

The Middle East is still an evolving, bloody, perhaps-intractable mess. It practically begs the removed observer to simply look away. With that said, the faults in Oren's book may well be my own bias against the subject.

Hrishi says

This was a book I'd been meaning to read for a very long time, and one that sat on my (virtual) shelf for nearly two years. I'd bought it on a lark back then, and my expectations going into it now were that it would be a detailed, unbiased telling of the 1967 Middle Eastern conflict, and that it would live up to the subtitle and draw connections to contemporary personalities and events (from 2002, when it was published). I'd say it

met those expectations for the most part as a narrative, but I'm left wanting more synthesis and insight from the author, Michael B Oren. (Who, interestingly enough, gave up his American citizenship to serve as Israel's ambassador to Washington. That the book is mostly objective, if not without bias and blind spots was a pleasant surprise to me therefore).

This is a well researched book and weaves the palace intrigues as reported by various key political and military players with information gleaned from official records and first hand accounts from the field to give a blow by blow account of the war. It takes its time to establish the context of the war, which I appreciated given how dynamic the Middle East is/ was. The six days of action are also well narrated and I had little trouble if any with following the action, though I did digress several times to look up maps and Wikipedia entries on people, places, and events, as any good history buff should when reading. I just wish the author had been as careful in recounting the aftermath and that the book had elaborated on the thesis implied by that subtitle: the last chapter does a somewhat hurried job of this and disappoints a bit in by questioning whether or not this conflict on its own was as significant as suggested or not! I felt a bit cheated!

Taking a step back, reading this book did help me understand the region better, and I (again) found it remarkable how the more things change, the more they remain the same - or if you'll forgive another cliché, how history repeats itself. 1967 had a militant Assad, a belligerent Israel, an indecisive but meddling America, an aggrieved Palestine, an Egypt in turmoil, a Jordan caught in the middle... sounds familiar? Well, except there's no more USSR...

It's also quite a depressing read in a way, because you can't help but feel that way as you realize how messed up that hoary region's history is, and how deep the grievances behind the Israel/ Palestine issue really run. A worthwhile read in the end, if you're a history buff!

Omar Ali says

An excellent history of the 1967 war, this book is even more useful in its coverage of the months leading up to the war. While it is written from a pro-Israeli perspective, the facts are not cherry-picked or outright falsified (as is common in more ideological books, from both the Left and the Right). Every important detail (and some unimportant ones..the book is long) is covered and the bias is usually limited to careful word choice or perspective, and does not extend to misreporting the "hard facts". For example, the attack on the USS Liberty is presented accurately but it is clear that the order and tone in which the facts are presented is consciously meant to justify the Israeli story (which I personally think is likely to be close to the truth in any case, so there is always that).

Of course the author believes Israel has every right to exist in that region, and his Arab (and increasingly, his Western SJW) critics start from the assumption that the attempt to create a Jewish state where Ottoman Palestine and its inhabitants already existed was illegal and immoral from the git go... If one starts from the second position then the significance and valence of the Arab and Israeli positions in the lead up to the war and the way one sees the war itself can become very different. But at the same time, those events themselves did take place more or less as described. The significance and moral valence are yours to judge.

One laughs (or cries, it depends) at the yawning gap between the Arab leaders grandiose and extravagant claims and military moves in the months prior to the war (whether they meant any of it or not is almost besides the point; they probably did not, but they all said it, and they, especially the Egyptians, moved troops around as if they meant it) and the actual abilities of their tinpot regimes. The lower level Arab units were brave enough, but the senior echelons (except in the relatively competent Jordanian army) were sub-standard and the top leadership was criminally incompetent and utterly buffoonish. Whether Israel laid a trap and they

fell into it, or it was a series of accidents and bad decisions, or something in between, the bare facts are brutal. Perhaps the best way to look at it is to note that the gap between the two cultures was just too great; the Arab buffoonery and grandstanding itself being just one manifestation of that tremendous cultural gap. And 15-20,000 ordinary soldiers and junior officers paid the ultimate penalty for it.

The book includes extensive quotes from both Israeli and Arab sources and fully captures the flavor of the time and the participants hopes and expectations at each stage. The self-doubt and arguments within the Israeli leadership are interesting, but perhaps a bit overplayed in an attempt to counter those who say it was all a premeditated Israeli trap. These arguments will no doubt continue.

It is fascinating to read what all the Arab leaders thought of each other..and how the "street" and their own delusions forced each country to join a "coalition" that was too united to avoid joint disaster and too disunited to do anything seriously coordinated...The way Egypt misled its own "ally" Jordan to sucker them into the war and how Syria lied to everyone from day one to day six are classics in the annals of useless alliances. There may be other examples like this somewhere in history, but offhand I cannot think of another example of a multi-national "coalition" as inept and self-defeating as this one.

Of course, one cannot fail to be impressed by the chutzpah, initiative, courage and competence of Israel's citizen army. At the same time, their undoubtedly impressive performance was greatly enhanced by buffoonery and incompetence at the highest levels of the Egyptian and Syrian armies. The Egyptian army could well have stood and fought a much bloodier and longer battle in the Sinai if "Field Marshal" Amer had not ordered them into headlong retreat after he personally fell to pieces on the second day of the war. And the Syrian collapse in the Golan was no less dramatic (and also caused partly by the high command losing its nerve). But while the overall picture is well presented and ground level anecdotes are aplenty (and not just from the Israeli side, though naturally, Israeli exploits get more play), this is not a "military history" book. If you are into the kind of book that shows countless maps and arrows and individual units and their maneuvers, you will need to add another book to this one.

Overall, well worth a read.

PS: I mentioned to a friend about how celebrations broke out across the Arab world on the first day of the war, as the population imagined that the long promised "march to Tel Aviv" had begun (and as their own radio related tales of great victories). This friend reminded me that such demonstrations did not just happen in the Arab world, they also took place in far away Pakistan. He recalled that in his locality in Karachi, people came out on the streets and distributed sweets (no doubt having heard, as radio Cairo was claiming, that hundreds of Israeli planes had been downed and the Egyptian army was marching into Negev). By the second day, some of the better informed had figured out (presumably from listening to the BBC) that the Arabs were actually losing, but most people refused to believe them. By the third day, general depression had set in. I am sure this pattern was repeated across the Muslim world.

<https://youtu.be/pvisd4N3tZI>

Neil Gussman says

Ignorance Can be the greatest ally or the greatest enemy of an army at war. In the book Six Days of War, Michael B. Oren explains in considerable detail how Arab ignorance and mistrust was the real key to the vastly outnumbered Israelis defeating three Arab armies in just six days.

Oren shows how the Israelis called up all of their reserves and prepared for weeks to attack Egypt before Egypt attacked them, or to defend if Egypt attacked first. And yet the Israeli attack on June 5, 1967, came as a complete surprise to the commander of the Egyptian Army.

The reasons are complicated, but Oren makes a strong case that Field Marshall Abdel Hakim Amer, supreme commander of Egyptian forces, filled the upper ranks of the Egyptian military with cronies, shoving aside talented leaders preparing for a coup against his childhood friend President Gamel Abdel Nasser.

The Israelis put Moshe Dayan in charge of the military just months before the war, another signal to anyone paying attention that the war plans were for an attack. Also, just months before the war, the Egyptians blockaded the Israeli port in Elat and all shipping. Time pressure pushed the Israelis to act, and yet, the Egyptians blustered and waited and did not prepare for an attack, let alone prepare for their own.

On June 5, nearly the entire Israeli Air Force attacked air bases all across Egypt. By the afternoon, more than 80% of the Egyptian Air Force was burning wreckage, most of it on the ground. Cratering charges made the airfields useless. At the same time, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) rolled into Sinai in a multi-pronged attack that succeeded so fast and so well that the most optimistic Israeli leaders could not believe it.

With so much of the IDF fighting on the ground and in the air in Sinai driving toward Egypt, if the Jordanian and Syrian armies had attacked, Israel would have to stop the attack and defend itself, at minimum pulling all air support away from Egypt.

Both the Syrians and the Jordanians had sworn mutual aid in case of attack.

But nothing happened. Iraq also was to attack in support of Egypt. Its forces sat in Jordan and Syria. On June 7, fighting started near Jerusalem. The Israelis had no plans to recapture Jerusalem, but the Jordanians fired on the IDF from the Mount Scopus and other heights in Jerusalem. the IDF attacked to take out the guns and by the night of June 9-10, retook Jerusalem and had the Jordanian army, including the vaunted Arab Legion in full retreat all across the West Bank of the Jordan River.

During this period, the Syrians shelled Israeli settlements. The settlers on the frontier howled for help. On June 10, the IDF attacked in the North toward Syria. If the Syrians had attacked, the Israelis would have been obliged to stop their offensives in Jordan and Egypt. But the Syrians shelled civilians and stayed still. Their army, like the other two Arab armies was in headlong retreat on June 11.

In war, the mistakes of the enemy are often as important as the plans of the winners. In this case, arrogance and mistrust among the Egyptian leaders was followed by a betrayal by their allies. The end was Israel more than doubling in territory and smashing three Arab armies.

Oren explains battles in great detail, especially retaking Jerusalem and the air attack that won the war on the first day. He also gives the reader a lot of detail about propaganda. Egypt used its media to deny their losses and tell the world they were winning the war. Part of the hesitation of the Jordanians and Syrians to come to

the aid of Egypt was the glowing reports Egypt was sending of their great victories.

The other overwhelming impression the book gave me is of how ignorant the Egyptians were of what the Israelis were doing despite the evidence in front of them. The rest of the world was also largely ignorant of how bad the situation was on the ground and how fast everything changed. It reminded me of how the world blundered into war in 1914.

This book tells a complicated story very well.

Jean says

I found this book about the Six Days of War by Michael B. Oren most interesting. At the time I remember following the news about the war on T. V. I have read biographies of many of the key people in this book so I am very familiar with the events. It was great to have all the information in one place in chronological order. It helped me to understand the events better as well as what is going on today in Israel.

The book is well written and meticulously researched. The author covered in detail all the events leading to the war as well as the war itself. I noted the author was born and educated in the United States but moved to Israel in 1973. Oren became Israel's Ambassador to the United States. He writes with the understanding of the workings of the Israeli government. Oren did not present an unbiased review of the events. If you are interested in the history of Israel or the Middle East this book will provide information about an important event.

I read this as an audiobook downloaded from Audible. The book is almost eighteen hours. Robert Whitfield does an excellent job narrating the book.

Eric says

I had somewhat of a sketchy rememberance of the 6 Day War from 1967, but digging into the details was rather eye opening. I'd never heard of a professional army so completely breaking and running in the face of enemy. Politically appointed officers is always a red flag for combat forces, and stories are plentiful of the incompetence of political officers in the field, but in the example of the Egyptian Army, the senior officers broke and ran away immediately...and the rest of the army simply followed. Appalling. This was a very well researched and well written book.
