

ISRAEL'S SECURITY SITUATION TODAY COMPARED TO THE 1967 WAR: DOING MUCH BETTER

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This upcoming week mark 50 years since the 1967 war. Compared to that showdown in 2017 Israel's national security situation is much better.

In early June 1967 Arab states had internal problems but today it is much worse, especially in countries like Syria. This Arab turmoil reduced dramatically the willingness and capabilities of Arab states to turn against Israel.

In late May 1967 Israel faced a clear and present danger. Several Arab militaries, mostly those of Egypt, Syria and Jordan, gathered their forces against Israel. Now the Syrian military is a shadow of what it used to be and Israel not only has peace with Jordan and Egypt but also there is security cooperation with them.

In 1967 Egypt provoked Israel by deploying about 100,000 troops in the Sinai Peninsula, a step that posed a major threat to Israel. In recent years Egypt asked and received permission from Israel to send tens of thousands of troops to Sinai, in order to fight their mutual enemy there, ISIS. Therefore while in 1967 Egypt's military deployment started the crisis that led eventually to war now Egyptian soldiers are supposed to help the two states to keep the peace.

However the ongoing Egyptian military presence in Sinai gradually undermines one of the foundations of the 1979 peace treaty, the demilitarization of Sinai. This development might cause a friction between the two states in the future. The outcome of the 2014 war in the Gaza Strip was not decisive and Hamas continues to refuse to recognize Israel's right to exist. However in 1967 although Israel clearly defeated Arab states they still insisted not to negotiate with Israel let alone about peace.

In early June 1967 the IDF destroyed Egypt's forces yet a few months later the war of attrition started, which showed how the Egyptian military managed to rehabilitate itself relatively fast after absorbing a crashing defeat. It was done with a massive support from the Soviet Union, the patron of Egypt at the time. Israel could not have done much to stop the delivery of Soviet military aid to Egypt. In contrast in recent years Israel and Egypt have been working together in disrupting the smuggling of weapons to the Gaza Strip. In addition Hamas has been an Iranian protégé but there is a certain rift between them and anyway Iran could not help Hamas as the Soviet Union did with Egypt in the late 1960s.

In early June 1967 Arab states had hundreds of thousands of troops and several thousands of weapon systems like aircraft, tanks, artillery pieces etc. which gave the Arabs an option to invade and conquer Israel. Today Israel's main enemies are Arab non-state organizations, mostly Hezbollah that has 30,000 men, a few tanks and no air force. Those Arab groups do have rockets and missiles, particularly Hezbollah that holds up to 150,000 projectiles that can reach any place in Israel. Hezbollah could inflict heavy casualties and cause substantial damages although it could not capture any Israeli territory. At most Hezbollah could seize a tiny spot inside Israel for a few days until it would be kicked out of there.

Iran, in contrast to 1967, has been an enemy of Israel. Yet as long as Iran does not produce nuclear weapon it does not pose a serious threat to the survival of Israel. Iran is more than a thousand kilometers from Israel and Iran's military is not that strong.

In 1967 Israel's border with the Gaza Strip, which was under Egyptian rule, was generally quiet. Yet in the years prior to the 1967 war the PLO launched assaults against Israel from neighboring Arab states, including from the West Bank, which was then in Jordanian hands. Now the PA in the West Bank maintains security cooperation with Israel, which is far from being perfect but it helps Israel to prevent guerrilla and terror attacks. It seems that the wave of Palestinian assaults that began in October 2015 has been slowing down yet one severe incident might bring an escalation and even another confrontation.

Before the 1967 war Israeli civilians in the north of Israel were often under Syrian fire from the Golan Heights. In the 1967 war Israel took the Golan Heights. In recent years, as part of the fight between the different parties in Syria, some fire hit the Golan Heights, usually by mistake. In almost all those cases no Israeli was hurt. If Israeli population absorbs casualties, Israel would respond, as it did on June 22 2014 when an Israeli was killed from a missile that was shot from Syria.

In the bottom line Israel has many security challenges yet its situation in this field has improved significantly compared to the era of the 1967 war.