

Reading Two: Six-Day War- MSN Encarta

CAUSES OF THE WAR

In the years before the Six-Day War, the Arab countries continually refused to acknowledge the legitimacy of the Jewish state, and Arab nationalists led by Nasser called for the destruction of Israel. Egypt and Jordan supported Palestinian *fedayeen* (guerrillas), who attacked troops and civilians in Israeli territory, then retreated to the Egyptian-controlled Gaza Strip or the Jordanian-controlled West Bank. From its Golan Heights region, Syria regularly shelled Israeli farms. For its part, Israel refused to accept Jordan's control of Jewish holy places in East Jerusalem. Israel also kept tensions high by responding to Arab incursions with reprisals on Arab territory.

In April 1967, after Syria heavily shelled Israeli villages from the Golan Heights, Israel and Syria engaged in aerial clashes. Israel shot down six of Syria's MiG fighter planes, which were given by the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Israel warned Syria against future attacks, and both the Syrians and Soviets were alarmed by the warning. Syria appealed to Nasser for backing, and in mid-May the Egyptian army moved 100,000 troops and 1000 tanks into the Sinai Peninsula on Israel's southern border. The United Nations (UN) had earlier stationed forces in the area as observers, but on May 17, Nasser called for the removal of UN personnel from several locations. Within days, all of the observers were removed. On May 22 Nasser announced the closure of the Strait of Tiran, a vital shipping corridor for Israel with links to the Red Sea and major sources of petroleum. A similar closure of the strait had been a major cause of the Suez Crisis in 1956; Israel had made clear since then that it would regard another closure as an act of war. Israel was further alarmed when Egypt and Jordan signed a treaty placing the two armies under a joint command. Despite a flurry of diplomatic effort, war seemed inevitable.

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