From Civil War to Interstate War and Back Again: The War over Israel/Palestine, 1945–2000

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Still from the film 'War Photographer' (Documentary, Switzerland 2001)

1. The 'Arab-Israeli Conflict': Not one Conflict, But Two

On 19 November 1977, Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's plane touched down at Ben-Gurion airport near Tel-Aviv. It was a dramatic act that surprised the public in Israel, Arab countries, and around the world. The warmth with which the visiting president was received in Israel was remarkable. Excited children waved Egyptian flags, men and women shed tears, and politicians from all corners of the political spectrum competed in trying to greet the president with the warmest hug. Sadat looked more than natural addressing the Knesset beneath a portrait of Theodor Herzl, the harbinger of the Jewish state. And the curious meeting between the Egyptian president and former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir resembled more a conversation between two elder-

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ly comrades who had not seen one another for a long time than a meeting of two leaders who had sent their soldiers to kill each other just four years earlier.[1]

From the historical perspective that we enjoy today, and considering that they fought five bloody wars within the time span of one generation (1948–1973), Israel and Egypt put an end to their state of war with relative ease. In March 1979, the two countries signed a peace treaty. And, although the peace that resulted has been far from 'warm', it has successfully survived difficult tests and can certainly be characterized as 'stable'. Following the Israeli-Egyptian treaty, Jordan officially revealed the clandestine relations it had hitherto maintained with Israel for decades. The Israeli-Egyptian treaty was also followed by Israeli contact with Syria (which since 1975 has strictly maintained its separation of forces agreement) and, via Syria, with Lebanon. In 1991, when Iraq attacked Israel with missiles during the first Gulf War, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia were on Israel's side – whether they like to admit it or not – by virtue of their membership in the American-led coalition that attacked Iraq.

Despite all of this, blood is still being shed in Israel/Palestine. The geographical unit defined by the British Mandate as Palestine still remains a permanent source of local and international instability. I argue that by discontinuing their war against Israel, the surrounding Arab states made room for the resumption of a different, new/old war, which, as I explain below, first erupted prior to the Arab-Israeli interstate war: the civil war between the Jewish-Zionist settler society and Palestinian Arabs, a war over Palestine.

Academic scholarship on the conflict tends not to mark 1945 as its beginning. Most pieces of scholarship refer to 1948. Thorough studies trace the conflict back to the years 1917–1923, or the beginning of British rule in Palestine. A few others trace it back to the beginning of Zionist settlement in the country towards the end of the 19th century.[2] For clear reasons, no one claims that the conflict came to an end in 1979, after the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty appeared to put an end to the era of Arab-Israeli interstate wars. This confusion stems to a large degree from the fact that the Arab-Israeli conflict is not one, but rather two conflicts, both of which are complexly and inextricably linked in a number of ways. Zionist Jews in Palestine (or the pre-1948 Jewish autonomy in the country) and later the state of Israel have permanently been a party to the conflict. By contrast, the 'Arabs' – or the Palestinians and the Arab states surrounding Palestine – have been changing parties to the overall conflict and its many different wars.

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[1] Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims. A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881–1999*, New York 1999, pp. 452-455.

[2] For the latest example of this (which is the exception), see Baruch Kimmerling/Joel S. Migdal, *The Palestinian People. A History*, Cambridge 2003.

Israel and the Middle East after 1967. (1948–1967, the West Bank was under Jordanian and Gaza Strip under Egyptian rule.)

2. Civil War Part I: the Internal Conflict until 1948/49

The internal conflict over Palestine began in the late 19th century, with the meeting of Jews and Arabs in the geographical region located west of the Jordan River that was formally given the name Palestine by its British colonial rulers in 1920. In the 1880s, the clash was only vaguely nationalist, but by the 1920s it had crystallized into a conflict that was distinctly nationalist in character. At its onset, the conflict's intensity depended on each party's self-definition. As long as the Jewish/Zionist settler society in Palestine did not adopt a distinct nationalist character with the sustainable political capability to advance its interests, it did not embark on a nationalist struggle.[3] As long as the local Arab community remained devoid of a distinct national identity, like the identity that had evolved among Arabs living in Syria and Lebanon, the struggle of the Arabs living west of the Jordan River was primarily a struggle for economic resources against a wave of Jewish immigration which, from the outset, possessed aspirations and capabilities that aroused concern among the Arabs.[4]

Britain's conquest of Palestine in 1917/18 was a watershed in the conflict. On the one hand, the new post-World War One world order facilitated the 'Balfour Declaration' of November 1917. This document contained the first recognition by a superpower of that time of the Jewish people's right to Palestine, as well as the first recognition of the Zionist movement as a legitimate political entity for negotiations regarding a 'Jewish national home in Palestine'. In 1923, the League of Nations approved this concept and inserted it into the Mandate charter granted to the British. On the other hand, in practice Britain's policy caused the Arabs living west of the Jordan River to develop into a distinct national entity. As early as 1920, the British supported the establishment of an Arab national congress (Palestinian, for all intents and purposes), and in 1922, when British Colonial Minister Winston Churchill severed Transjordan from the Palestine Mandate, the Palestinian Arabs' evolving national identity received clear geopolitical approval.[5]

It should therefore come as no surprise that this conflict over land and water quickly became a conflict over territory, holy places, and future sovereignty between two national groups: a Jewish/Zionist group, which would later become Israeli, and an Arab/Palestinian group, which would later be called Palestinian. This conflict assumed the character of a continuous civil war, fluctuating in intensity from its onset in 1920 until its height in 1948. The crushing

[3] Anita Shapira, *Land and Power*, Tel Aviv 1992 (Hebrew).

[4] Yehoshua Porath, *The Emergence of the Palestine-Arab National Movement, 1918–1929*, London 1974.

[5] Dvorah Barzilay Yegar, *A National Home for the Jewish People. The Concept in British Thinking and Making 1917–1923*, Jerusalem 2003 (Hebrew).

defeat suffered by the Palestinian Arabs at the hands of the Palestinian Jews in 1948 caused a temporary hiatus in this conflict, at least until the 1970s. This break in the conflict, and its subsequent resumption, was caused not only by the Jewish/Zionist victory but also by the rise and fall of a different conflict: the conflict between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries.

The countries of the modern Middle East as we know them today crystallized rapidly as a result of the new post-World War One world order in general, and the Mandate system that facilitated temporary British and French control of the Middle East in particular. Between 1936 and 1939, the Palestinian Arabs staged an armed revolt against the British Mandate authorities. This rebellion, or 'revolution', as it was called by those who carried it out, was undoubtedly a formative event in the history of the still evolving Palestinian national movement.[6] The revolt was a complete failure, and the blow that the Palestinians sustained at the hands of the British (primarily in 1938) was so serious that by the time they reached the decisive confrontation with the country's Jewish community in 1948, it can be argued that they no longer had any realistic chance of prevailing. However, before deciding to employ a military option to put down the revolt, the British attempted to pressure the Arab political entities under their influence into moderating the Palestinians. Since then, these Arab countries, along with Syria and Lebanon, have been directly involved in the events taking place west of the Jordan River. Britain's establishment of the Arab League in late 1944 gave this involvement a pan-Arab character. At least that is how it appeared.[7]

The new international reality that followed World War Two caused Britain and France to relinquish direct rule in the Middle East, and the Arab states received full independence. By mid-1948, despite continued Anglo-French influence, the Arab states were ready for a limited war against Israel, which, like them, had also recently gained independence. But internal tensions within Palestine had already evolved into a bitter Jewish-Arab civil war, erupting first in the country's urban centers, where friction between the two national communities was the greatest. From there, the civil war spread to the country's rural areas. While such civil wars tend not to have traditional front lines, this war had a clear victor. The war erupted in December 1947 with sporadic displays of violence and concluded in May 1948 with the decisive defeat of the Palestinian Arabs by the Jewish inhabitants of Palestine.

After 1948, the Palestinian Arabs remained passive for a generation, not only due to their bitter defeat, but also due to the common interest shared by Israel and its neighboring Arab states in excluding them from the conflict.

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[6] Yehoshua Porath, *The Palestine-Arab National Movement, 1929–1939. From Riots to Rebellion*, London 1977.

[7] Morris, *Righteous Victims* (fn. 1), pp. 134-135.

During the time between the Arab states' invasion (15 May 1948) and the signing of the Israeli-Syrian armistice (20 July 1949, the last in a series of armistices with Arab states in 1949), one basic fact was undeniably clear: all participants in the war, for their own reasons, had no interest in the continuation of the civil war in Israel/Palestine.

The two participants most interested in discontinuing the civil war were Israel and Jordan, as each perceived the Palestinian national movement as a threat to its existence. Israel had just finished its struggle against Palestinians who claimed every last inch of land and certainly had no interest in another round. A notable result of this position was the policy of blocking Palestinian refugee repatriation adopted by the Israeli provisional government from the time it began functioning in May 1948.[8] For Jordan in general and King Abdullah in particular, the Palestinians were the most unstable element within the new state. If Jordan faced an existential threat, it came from the Palestinians.[9]

The discussions held by the Arab League on the eve of the May 1948 invasion clearly reflected the fact that the Arab states were not sincerely interested in the Palestinian issue. After the war, not even the waves of refugees (which were problematic for all of Israel's neighbors) brought the Arab states to take action in accordance with the refugees' collective national interests; that is, with an eye to establishing a Palestinian state. After 1949, the conflict sustained by these countries with Israel was subordinated to their own distinct interests as individual states. In this context, Arab declarations should not mislead us. The only chance for advancing the battered Palestinian interest lay in the Pan-Arab myth, which could be given expression only through the actions of the Arab League. But after 1945, Pan-Arabism became a political concept with steadily declining practical value.

Even Israel's border wars with its neighbors during the years 1949–1956, which began as actions attempting to prevent Palestinian refugees from returning to their homes, quickly evolved into days of limited warfare between the IDF[10] and the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Syrian armies respectively. The combination of the Palestinian refugees' desire for repatriation and Israel's firm insistence on safeguarding its fragile sovereignty had the potential to trigger off the civil war again. However, in October 1953, following the IDF's over-retaliation against the Palestinian-inhabited Jordanian village of Kibiya, Israel

[8] Israel State Archives, Meetings of the Israeli Provisional Government, 2.6.1948, 14.6.1948, Vol. 1-2; Shelly L. Fried, *'They Are Not Coming Back'. The Crystallization of Israeli Policy Toward Possible Solution to the Palestinian Refugee Problem, 1947–1956*, Doctoral Thesis, Tel Aviv University 2003 (Hebrew).

[9] Avi Shlaim, *Collusion Across the Jordan. King Abdullah, the Zionist Movement and the Partition of Palestine*, New York 1988.

[10] IDF = Israel Defense Forces. Founded formally in May 1948.

began redirecting its retaliatory strikes (in response to acts of Palestinian sabotage) towards the armies of neighboring 'host countries'. Consequently, the Palestinians soon found themselves on the sidelines. And during the 1960s, when most of Israel's border wars were against Syrian and Jordanian forces and revolved around the issue of water, the Palestinians had no part to play in the conflict whatsoever.[11]

3. The Arab-Israeli Interstate Wars

Britain's final withdrawal from Palestine in May 1948, after the Palestinians' decisive defeat in the civil war, pitted the recently established state of Israel against its Arab neighbors for the first time. Not only was the character of the conflict about to change, but so were its motivating forces. The factors motivating the participants in the new conflict did not run as deep and were not as dramatic as those that had motivated the Jewish-Arab civil war over Palestine. Israel's conflict with the Palestinians was and, in many ways, still is a question of 'to be or not to be' for both sides. By contrast, the conflicts and wars between Israel and its Arab neighbors were limited in nature from the outset. This influenced both the nature of the wars that were to shape the conflict and the ability of the parties to eventually reach reasonable de jure (as in the case of Egypt and Jordan) and de facto (as in the case of Syria and Lebanon) arrangements.

Israel and its neighbors fought in five rounds of warfare between 1948 and 1973. The first round began in May 1948, when the armies of four Arab countries invaded the former Mandate territory of Palestine, of which Israel already controlled a portion. The four countries that actively participated in the attack were Egypt, Jordan, Syria, and Iraq. Lebanon's involvement was limited to political support and opening fire from Lebanese territory on IDF forces across the border to the south. At the end of the war in 1949, Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria (in that chronological order) each signed separate armistice agreements with Israel. Iraq withdrew unilaterally without changing the status of its relations with Israel. These agreements recognized Israeli rule over the areas that were designated for the Jewish state in the partition plan approved by the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1947 (Resolution 181). It also recognized Israeli rule over most of the other territory conquered by Israel during the war, which took place at the expense of the Palestinian Arab state that did not end up by coming into existence. The agreements also recognized Jordanian rule in the eastern hills of central Palestine, Egyptian rule in the Gaza

[11] Motti Golani (ed.), *Black Arrow. Gaza Raid and the Israeli Policy of Retaliation*, Haifa 1994 (Hebrew).

Strip, and a critical Syrian foothold at the source of Israel's water supply. They also reinstituted the international border along Israel's frontier with Lebanon, which had been adopted by the British and the French soon after World War One.[12]

The second round of the conflict between Israel and the Arab states began on 29 October 1956, when the IDF attacked the Egyptian army in the Sinai Peninsula. Israel undertook this action as a junior partner in a tripartite coalition, along with Britain and France. According to a secret agreement between the three countries, Israel was charged with attacking Egypt and then agreeing to an Anglo-French ultimatum to withdraw from the Suez Canal Zone. As it was certain that Egypt would refuse such a demand, the two former superpowers would then send military forces to 'make peace' in the Suez Canal. The pretext for the attack was the Egyptian government's nationalization of the Suez Canal Company in late July 1956, shortly after the last British soldier left Egyptian soil. Britain and France regarded the Egyptian nationalization of the Suez Canal Company as the beginning of the complete disintegration of their already weakened respective presences in the oil-rich Middle East. France believed that Egypt was providing support for the continuing rebellion in Algeria (1954–1962). Israel did its part, and by 6 November its army had occupied the entire Sinai Peninsula, but had not made contact with the Suez Canal, where an Anglo-French force had landed one day earlier. By 7 November, the two superpowers had halted hostilities, and by 21 December every last French and British soldier had been withdrawn from Egypt. After exhaustive negotiations, Israel was forced to agree to a full withdrawal in exchange for demilitarization of the Gaza Strip and assurance of safe passage through the Straits of Tiran, at the entrance to the Red Sea. Israel had won the battle, but the political victory was Egypt's.[13]

The third round began ten years later, as a result of deteriorating relations of which both sides lost control. Due to intensifying water-related conflagrations between Syria and Israel (1964–1967),[14] Egypt placed military forces in the Sinai Peninsula in abrogation of the agreements that had been signed under UN auspices in 1957 following the Sinai war. Despite the fact that the Egyptians had prepared themselves defensively, Israel understood from Egyptian declarations that Egypt was aiming for war. Jordan was also affected by Egypt's enthusiasm, signing a hasty mutual defense pact with Egypt. Israel, a country gripped by fear, was unable to handle additional political negotiations to solve

[12] Yemina Rosental, From War to an Agreement – Israel's and its Neighbor's Armistice Negotiation, in: Mordechai Naor (ed.), *First Year of Independence, 1948–1949*, Jerusalem 1980 (Hebrew), pp. 177-200.

[13] Motti Golani, *Israel in Search of a War. The Sinai Campaign 1955–1956*, Brighton 1998.

[14] Ami Gluska, *Eshkol, Give the Order! Israel's Army Command and Political Leadership on the Road to the Six Day War, 1963–1967*, Tel Aviv 2004, chapters 4-7 (Hebrew).

the crisis. On 5 June 1967, the Israeli air-force attacked Egypt and Syria, and on the same day the IDF re-entered the Sinai Peninsula. In accordance with its obligations, Jordan began attacking Israel, and Israel therefore directed its army eastward as well. After the defeat of the Egyptian and Jordanian armies was almost complete and Israel conquered the Sinai and the West Bank (the Jordanian controlled territory west of the Jordan River, which included East Jerusalem), the IDF also entered Syria and by 11 June had conquered the Golan Heights.[15] Egypt regained the Sinai Peninsula after its peace agreement with Israel, and Jordan unilaterally relinquished its claims to the West Bank in 1988. As we will see, it was the outcome of this war that facilitated the renewal of the civil war that had come to a halt in 1948.

The fourth round took place along the Suez Canal and between Jordan and Israel along the Jordan River. In practice, it began in July 1967. In theory, however, it began in April 1969, when Egyptian President Gamal Abdul Nasser declared a 'War of Attrition' against Israel. During this war, which for Israel was static and far from the home front, both countries lost hundreds of soldiers. For the Egyptians, the hostilities reached into the very heart of the Nile Valley, primarily from the air. The war ended with the signing of an armistice agreement in August 1970.[16]

The fifth round began for Israel in the form of a well-known intelligence failure. On 6 October, the Egyptian and Syrian armies staged a coordinated surprise attack on Israel.[17] After a number of failed attempts at repulsing it, the IDF began a counter-attack that eventually resulted with cease-fire lines west of the Suez Canal about 100 km from Cairo, despite the fact that some Egyptian forces remained cut off to the east of these lines (like the Third Army, which was under siege in the northern Suez Canal). On the Syrian front, IDF cannons threatened Damascus from a distance of only 40 km.[18] The disengagement agreements signed between Israel and Egypt and Israel and Syria stipulated the return of troops to their pre-war positions. The Egyptian-Israeli disengagement agreement laid the basis for the peace treaty of 1979. While the Syrian-Israeli disengagement agreement has not served as the basis for a peace treaty, it has been consistently honored until today.

[15] Michael Oren, The Six-Day War, in: Mordechai Bar-On (ed.), *A Never-Ending Conflict. A Guide to Israeli Military History*, Westport 2004, pp. 133-137.
[16] Dan Schueftan, *Attrition. Egypt Post War Political Strategy, 1967–1970*, Tel Aviv 1989 (Hebrew).
[17] Uri Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman Fell Asleep. The Surprise of Yom Kippur and its Sources*, Tel Aviv 2001 (Hebrew).
[18] Morris, *Righteous Victims* (fn. 1), p. 437.

4. Analyzing the Five Rounds of the Arab-Israeli War

Between the establishment of Israel in 1948, the conclusion of the 1973 war and the disengagement agreements in 1975, Israel's borders have known not even one day of quiet. Nevertheless, the lion's share of popular and academic attention has, justifiably, been focused on the five rounds of warfare discussed above. Indeed, the years 1948–1973 can be regarded as a twenty-five year war between Israel and its neighbors – one war, with five rounds, taking place over one generation. Not only were the wars separated by extremely short periods of time (six to ten years), but the conclusion of each war contained the seeds of the war that followed. In fact, had it not been for Sadat's initiative and the Israeli government's willingness to go along with it (1976–1979), it is likely that this pattern would have continued uninterrupted. In addition to these factors, all five rounds, including the War of Attrition, which was in some ways different from the other rounds, were like all wars in all places since World War Two, that is, limited to non-nuclear warfare. They were extremely similar in three important ways: First, they were all limited in time, scope, and aims. Second, each round fitted well into the international context of the time – the Cold War. Third, although the wars were waged during a period of international balance of power based on nuclear terror, the movement, character, and types of battlefields that characterized the warfare were in fact continuations of warfare characteristic of World War Two (primarily in Europe and the western desert).

Limited military confrontations: Each of Israel's wars with its neighbors was limited in means, aims, and time. During the first round, which as we have seen began in May 1948, each of the four invading armies aimed at nothing more than a limited grab of territory that would endow it with a foothold in Palestine. For the most part, Arab territorial aspirations eyed the territory designated by the 1947 UN partition plan as part of the future Palestinian Arab state. This pursuance of limited aims was the result of the belief held by the heads of the Arab regimes and their armies at a time when they were not capable, as individual combatants or as a coalition, of defeating Israel's military, which had demonstrated its effectiveness during the civil war of 1947/48. Factors resulting in this assessment included the Arab armies' lack of combat experience (especially when it came to operations far from their regular bases, requiring long and extremely vulnerable supply lines), the limited scope and quality of their weaponry, the necessity of leaving special forces behind to safeguard the countries' respective regimes, and the divided nature of the invading Arab coalition. For its part, Israel possessed neither the military, economic, nor political capability to undertake measures other than those absolutely necessary for bringing about an end to the war and preventing the invading armies from endangering its existence. This was true even after the Israeli

military concluded its defensive operations in May/June 1948 and embarked on a strategic counter-offensive in July. The IDF was ordered to drive the Arab armies out of the areas that had been designated for the Jewish state. Israel assumed that all territory conquered outside of these areas would serve as a starting point and a bargaining chip for negotiations aimed at ending the war. Furthermore, the instances in which Israeli forces entered the territory of neighboring countries during the first round were either aimed at shaping the country's future water regime (in the case of Lebanon in November 1948) or the result of initiatives taken by military officers in the field (in the case of Egypt in December 1948).[19]

The limited nature of the second round was even more pronounced. While six countries (including Lebanon) took part in the fighting during the first round, most of the Sinai war (from 29 October to 5 November 1956) involved only Israeli forces and Egyptian forces. For all intents and purposes, the Israeli-Egyptian battle had already been decided by the time Britain and France joined the fighting. For the most part, the IDF fought in training conditions against a thinned out Egyptian army, most of which had been stationed along the Suez Canal and to the west, in anticipation of an Anglo-French attack. The Israeli-British-French agreement limited Israel in time and territorial aims, including a provision that prohibited the IDF from reaching the Suez Canal and, in this way, from presenting Egypt with an effective threat. The Egyptian army was not the only army that operated in a limited manner. Israel also activated only two-thirds of its military force.[20]

By contrast to the first round in 1948, during the third round, which took place in 1967, Israel possessed the economic and logistical capabilities and the international backing necessary to wage a long-term war. The coalition of Arab states that participated in the 1967 war, including Egypt, Jordan, and Syria, also enjoyed significantly greater capabilities and experience than the Arab coalition of 1948. However, the Arab countries' quicker than expected defeat at the hands of Israel shocked both sides, and this (in addition to the pressure of the superpowers discussed below) resulted in a quick cessation of hostilities. Israel mostly limited its attacks to military targets or targets directly serving the war effort. Even though the surrounding Arab countries operated indiscriminately against Israeli targets, they did not succeed in causing significant damage to the Israeli civilian home front due to their quick defeat. However, the distinction between Israeli and Arab strikes against civilian home fronts cannot be understood in terms of war ethics. Rather, it was the result of a geogra-

[19] Some good works dealt with these issues. See for example David Tal, *War in Palestine, 1948: Strategy and Diplomacy*, London 2004; Yoav Gelber, *Independence Versus Nakba. Israel, the Palestinian and the Arab States 1948*, Lod 2004 (Hebrew).

[20] Motti Golani, The Sinai War, 1956. Three Partners, Three Wars, in: Bar-On, *A Never-Ending Conflict* (fn. 15), pp. 87-108.

phical situation in Israel in which there was no significant territorial difference between the front lines and the home front on the one hand, and in which Israeli forces were operating relatively far from the important civilian centers of the neighboring countries. But even if Israel had the ability to strike its neighbors with a critical blow by means of conventional, and, as it appears, non-conventional weapons, it did not do so.

The fourth round, which lasted from the summer of 1967 to the summer of 1970, was limited by the aims of its participants and the geographical demarcation of the confrontation. Most of the fighting was between Egypt and Israel along the Suez Canal, and between Jordan and Israel along the Jordan River. This time, each side did not hesitate to strike indiscriminately at its enemy. During this round, it was Israeli forces that were positioned close to its neighbors' home front, while its own home front was located relatively far from the warfare. However, because none of the participants in the confrontation were interested in a mobile war, and because their primary aim was to bring about political change by means of military pressure, the confrontation itself was one of trench warfare (especially along the Egyptian-Israeli front), similar to warfare during World War One.[21]

The fifth round was the closest of the five rounds to a total war, which appears to be the reason why it was the last round. Israel was surprised (at least on an intelligence and operational level) and, it seems, closer than ever before to using non-conventional weapons.[22] However, this war was also ultimately limited to an intensive military confrontation on both sides of the Suez Canal on the Israeli-Egyptian front, and in the Golan Heights on the Israeli-Syrian front.

In addition to these factors, a number of bilateral forces were extremely influential behind the scenes of the various rounds of Arab-Israeli warfare. Egypt never regarded the Palestinian conflict as an existential threat. Its army was the last to enter war in 1948 and the first to leave it in 1949. It is no coincidence that Egypt was the first to officially improve its relations with Israel, from the level of the cease-fire and armistice to that of the peace treaty.

Israeli-Jordanian relations influenced the nature of the five rounds as well. After 1948, the secret Hashemite-Zionist alliance that had existed since the 1920s became a secret Jordanian-Israeli alliance. Despite the crucial importance of the wars to Israel and Jordan, warfare between the two countries after 1948 (the 1967 war and the War of Attrition) was the exception that proved the rule. The 1994 Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty was a formal expression of relations that already existed. In 1948, the Jordanian army refrained from entering territory that the 1947 UN partition plan had designated for Israeli rule. Israel

[21] Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman* (fn. 17), part A, pp. 35-67.
[22] Seymour M. Hersh, *The Samson Option. Israel, America and the Bomb*, London 1993.

quietly and knowingly compensated the Jordanian regime, primarily with territory that the partition plan had designated for the Arab state. For its part, the Jordanian regime did all it could to prevent Palestinian refugees in Jordan from operating against Israel. With the conclusion of the War of Attrition in 1970, Israel was prepared to use its military to prevent Syria from conquering Jordan. Thereafter, King Hussein of Jordan withstood temptation in 1973 and, in contrast to 1967, did not join the war against Israel, with which he had maintained direct but clandestine relations since 1962.[23]

Israel and Lebanon have consistently maintained their agreement regarding the international border separating the two countries. In fact, if it had not been for Palestinian operations within Lebanon, neither Israel nor its neighbors would have had any interest in changing the border after the armistice agreement of 1949. For their part, Syria and Israel were able to prevent their bitter confrontation over water from developing into war until 1967, despite the temptation to resort to conflict.

A function of the Cold War: As we have seen, Israel's conflict with the surrounding Arab states was rooted in the period preceding the establishment of Israel and a number of its neighbors as sovereign states. Historical scholarship presents different reasons for each round. It is possible to distinctly characterize each Arab state's battle against Israel for the entire 25 years under discussion here (1948–1973). We can also identify local and regional factors for the entire conflict. However, it is important to note that each of the five military confrontations took place in the contemporary international context of the Cold War. To a certain degree, we can argue that the policies of the two major superpowers, which were at times expressed by their emissaries, periodically determined the length of the wars, sometimes determined whether they broke out at all, and always determined their limited nature and the manner in which they were concluded. Relations between the two major superpowers, and between each superpower and its allies, were consistently accompanied by dramatically influential policies that either encouraged or discouraged war in each instance.

During the first round in 1948/49, Soviet backing, political support, and arms supplies constituted a major Israeli priority. The ambiguous policy of the west, especially its weapons embargo on the region, had a negative impact on the Arab states at war with Israel, all of which were under western influence. The pressure of the superpowers resulted in Arab hesitation during the invasion, as well as Israeli withdrawal from Arab territory at the end of the war. In addition to the other factors listed above, the fact that both sides had a limited supply of arms and time, and could only partially realize their territorial

[23] Shlaim, *Collusion* (fn. 9); Gluska, *Eshkol* (fn. 14), pp. 159-161; Moshe Zake, *Hussein Making Peace*, Ramat Gan 1996 (Hebrew).

aspirations, forced them to limit the scope of the war. By early 1949, this also forced the sides to begin diplomatic negotiations, ostensibly under the auspices of the UN but in reality under the auspices of the two major superpowers (the approval of which was always vital to the effectiveness of the UN), which brought the war to an end.[24]

In 1956, war broke out without the encouragement of the two superpowers and in opposition to their interests. From the outset, the participants planned the operation under the assumption that American and Soviet intervention could be expected and therefore that as much as possible should be accomplished until such intervention actually came. The United States attempted to prevent a rupture within NATO with its most important allies. This split, in conjunction with American concerns over the recent onset of Soviet infiltration into the region (with the USSR's promise to fund the Aswan Dam) and Soviet attempts to ensure this involvement, resulted in an extremely rare cooperative effort between the two superpowers, including aggressive joint diplomacy. This activity forced Britain and France to cease military actions in Egypt less than 48 hours after they began, and also forced Israel to withdraw unconditionally from all the territory it had conquered during the operation.[25]

During the third round in 1967, it was the USSR that worked to deteriorate the relations between Israel and Syria, Egypt, and the United States, whose approval was necessary for Israel to decide to attack. The Soviets undertook intensive diplomatic action to stop the war shortly after it began. During the War of Attrition, or the fourth round, both Egypt and Israel acted out of a desire to please their respective benefactors. In Egypt's case this was the Soviet Union, and in Israel's case this was the United States. The ceasefire of August 1970 was signed only when it appeared that Soviet involvement in Egypt had increased dramatically, and that Israel threatened to strike a critical blow at the Egyptian home front and Soviet assets in Egypt.[26]

During the fifth and final round, Egypt acted to the chagrin of the USSR, and, for the first time, American actions taken to aid Israel bordered on active intervention. However, as we have seen, it was primarily the danger of slipping into nuclear war that stopped the war and made it the last round. It is reasonable to assume that another round of Arab-Israeli warfare could easily have led to a major tragedy for the entire world.

So far, the discussion indicates that Israel's twenty-five year war with its Arab neighbors had to be limited, due both to the nature of relations among the participants and to their places within the international Cold War system. The other possibilities that existed as options in 1967 and 1973 would have re-

[24] Rosental, From War to an Agreement (fn. 12).
[25] Mordechai Bar-On, *The Gates of Gaza. Israel's Road to Suez and Back, 1955–1957*, London 1994; Golani, *Israel in Search of a War* (fn. 13).
[26] Bar-Joseph, *The Watchman* (fn. 17), pp. 62-67.

sulted in a horrific scenario for all the parties involved, as well as for the two major superpowers, which undoubtedly feared that the news of world nuclear war would eventually emerge from the extremely unstable Middle East. This is the dynamic that shaped the operative character of the military confrontations between Israel and the Arab states.[27]

World War Two Style Warfare: The limitations discussed above meant that the sides resorted to conventional warfare by default. This, in turn, shaped the Arab-Israeli battlefield in line with types of warfare characteristic of World War Two. It also transformed Arab-Israeli battlegrounds into practical testing grounds for new conventional weapons produced by the weapons industry of major and second-tier superpowers.[28]

One cannot help but take notice of the manner in which the tank battles fought in the Sinai Peninsula between 1956 and 1973 were inspired by those fought in the nearby western desert between 1939 and 1942. For example, the IDF was greatly influenced by the operational behavior of the German General Erwin Rommel during World War Two – forward penetration with a thin, piercing line, and then backward expansion of the foothold (1956, 1967 and the counter back offensive of 1973). Another example was Israel's decision to parachute infantry forces into the Egyptian rear in 1956. Although the immediate factors motivating this action were diplomatic (the fulfillment of the terms of Israel's secret agreement with Britain and France), it also brought to mind the aerial portion of Operation 'Market Garden', which was undertaken by Allied forces in Holland in September 1944.[29]

5. Civil War Part II: from the 1970s to the Present

Historical processes by nature do not abide by clearly organized rules, such as the rule that one process begins only after the previous one ends. In most cases, historical processes overlap chronologically to varying degrees. In this way, the civil war that died down in Palestine in 1948 came back to life and began having an impact even before the era of Arab-Israeli interstate wars came to an end. For the first time since 1948, the 1967 war created a public that was purely Palestinian (not Jordanian-Palestinian, Egyptian-Palestinian, or Israeli-Palestinian). Israel refrained from annexing the territories it occupied, and its population was placed under military rule. This political and demographic reality fueled the Palestinian national struggle. In conjunction with the Palestinians' recovery from the shock of their monumental defeat in 1948, the crys-

[27] Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, New York 1998.
[28] Martin van Creveld, *The Art of War. War and Military Thought*, London 2002, pp. 190-192.
[29] Elhanan Orren (ed.), *H.B. Liddell Hart, Strategy of Bypassing Approach. Hundreds Generations of Wars*, Tel Aviv 1978 (Hebrew); Cornelius Ryan, *A Bridge Too Far*, London 1974.

tallization of a Palestinian political force with considerable influence (especially in Lebanon), and the Arab states' continuing failure in their wars against Israel, this reality returned the Palestinians to the struggle. By means of their transformation from a minor force just prior to the 1967 war, into a force carrying out terrorist actions against Israel and, by 1975, into the primary cause of the Lebanese civil war, the Palestinians reinvigorated the civil war over Palestine and made it a major force in Middle East politics. The conclusion of the Arab-Israeli wars contributed to this process. Furthermore, from the 1970s onward, all of Israel's wars, whether inside or outside its own borders, were part of the renewed Palestinian civil war.

A good example of this phenomenon is the Lebanon War. The war began with Israel's Operation 'Peace for the Galilee' in June 1982, staged against Palestinians operating in Lebanon, and concluded with Israel itself getting bogged down in the Lebanese civil war. Beginning with IDF activity in Lebanon in 1976, continuing with Israel's Operation Litani in 1978, and culminating with Operation Peace for the Galilee, Israeli forces invaded Lebanon according to the contemporary model of Arab-Israeli wars. However, after a quick and organized Syrian withdrawal from the country, the IDF took the unusual step of entering Beirut – an Arab capital – in its war against the semi-regular forces operating among the civilian population.[30] In 1985, Israel's failed attempt to forge a new order in Lebanon caused it to withdraw to a security zone located north of the international border, in Lebanese territory. The war continued within this security zone until the IDF withdrew from Lebanon completely in May 2000. From this point on, it was not the Lebanese army that faced Israeli forces in southern Lebanon. Rather, it was local forces such as Amal and Hizbullah, which adopted Palestinian methods of operation. In fact, in Lebanon, it appears that Israel reverted to the model of inter-communal warfare that had been waged in Mandate Palestine.

Prior to the conclusion of the war in Lebanon, Israel was forced to address a more popular type of warfare than that experienced by the IDF in Lebanon. The War of Lebanon and the failure of Egyptian diplomatic activity to lead the way to possible Palestinian autonomy, led in December 1987 to a popular Palestinian uprising (Intifada), which, for all intents and purposes, lasted until the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993. In contrast to the previous and following rounds of the civil war, this one consisted of a fight between the army and police of one side and civilians (most of them children, teenagers, and women) of the other, during which 'live fire' was generally not used.[31] From the relatively short historical perspective that we enjoy today, it appears that the civil war has not yet come to an end. Despite the phase of Israeli-Palestinian relati-

[30] Ze'ev Schiff/Ehud Ya'ari, *Israel's Lebanon War*, London 1985.
[31] Idem, *Intifada. The Palestinian Uprising – Israel's Third Front*, New York 1990.

ons ushered in by the Oslo Accords, which will undoubtedly have an important impact on future inter-communal relations between the two parties, another violent confrontation erupted between Israel and the Palestinians in September 2000. The current uprising, which is known as the Al-Aqsa Intifada, has been less popular than the first Intifada. In fact, it appears to be similar in nature to the civil war of Palestine 1947/48 and Israel's clashes with the Palestinians in Lebanon during the 1970s and 1980s.[32]

When examining the overall Arab-Israeli conflict during the post-World War Two period, the rise and fall of conventional wars between Israel and the surrounding Arab countries is especially noteworthy. From the perspective of a historian today, it is clear that Israel's wars with its neighbors constituted a break in the primary and fundamental conflict within the greater Arab-Israeli conflict: the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. This is more of a running internal conflict than an interstate conflict over international influence, although this aspect plays an important role here as well. This explains the continuing and consistent failure of the United States or Europe to institute a peaceful settlement in the Middle East. The people living in Israel/Palestine hold primary responsibility for this failure. It is for them to decide whether the recent death of Arafat will further possible peace solutions or not. Nevertheless, one can hardly escape the conclusion that, in the Israeli–Arab/Palestinian case, it is more difficult to put an end to the civil war over Palestine than to the interstate wars.

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[32] Amos Harel/Avi Yisscharoff, *The Seventh War: How We Won and Why We Have Failed in the War with the Palestinians*, Tel Aviv 2004 (Hebrew).