

# Israel Simply Wants to Hold Its High Cards

By Alfred Friendly Washington Post Foreign Service

*The Washington Post, Times Herald (1959-1973); Aug 27, 1967; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Washington Post (1877 - 1988)*

pg. B2

# Israel Simply Wants to Hold Its High Cards

By Alfred Friendly

Washington Post Foreign Service

JERUSALEM—With more melancholy than pleasure, Israeli officials repeat a gag said to have made the rounds of the United Nations General Assembly after the six-day war: "The Americans are so unaccustomed to having a victory that now that they have won one, they're looking around for someone to give it away to."

The wisecrack encapsulates Israel's chief current worry: that the sharp diplomatic as well as military lines left at the war's end will be fuzzed by third parties, including Israel's friends, seeking a compromise settlement too soon before its enemies are constrained to make a safe one.

Israel feels that its victory left it in an infinitely better situation than it has enjoyed since it came into existence in 1948. Militarily, its border with Jordan is less than half its previous length and runs along the Jordan River, a natural defensive line. It has put the whole Sinai Peninsula between it and Egypt. It holds the Golan heights in Syria, whence once artillery fire poured down on its settlements.

Diplomatically, it now holds something the Arab states want, namely, part of their territory, and therefore those states might ultimately be willing to do what they have refused to do for 19 years: bargain with Israel to get it back. Israel desperately wants such bargaining to achieve its two fundamental aims: recognition from the Arabs of its right to peaceful existence and military arrangements providing for its security.

## Cynical Toward U.N.

IN A COUNTRY otherwise full of argument, there is none on this point. Israel is determined not to abandon its improved military position for anything short of the agreements it feels essential to its future security. It is equally unanimous in its conviction that agreements with anyone other than its immediate Arab neighbors will not provide that security.

Its experience with the Soviet veto in the Security Council, with the United Nations as a whole, with the pious statements of 15 or more nations in the Gulf of Aqaba and with their nonfeasance in obtaining its passage through

the Suez Canal—all this has left it utterly cynical about the value of international guarantees and international organizations.

Israel has seen, to put the matter the other way, that only its own unaided military power won it victory. It is therefore not inclined to put its trust in anything else.

The nation's leaders believe, in addition, that through Israel, America also won a profound conflict of interest between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Middle East. They note that on the day before the war, America's position was close to being in ruins.

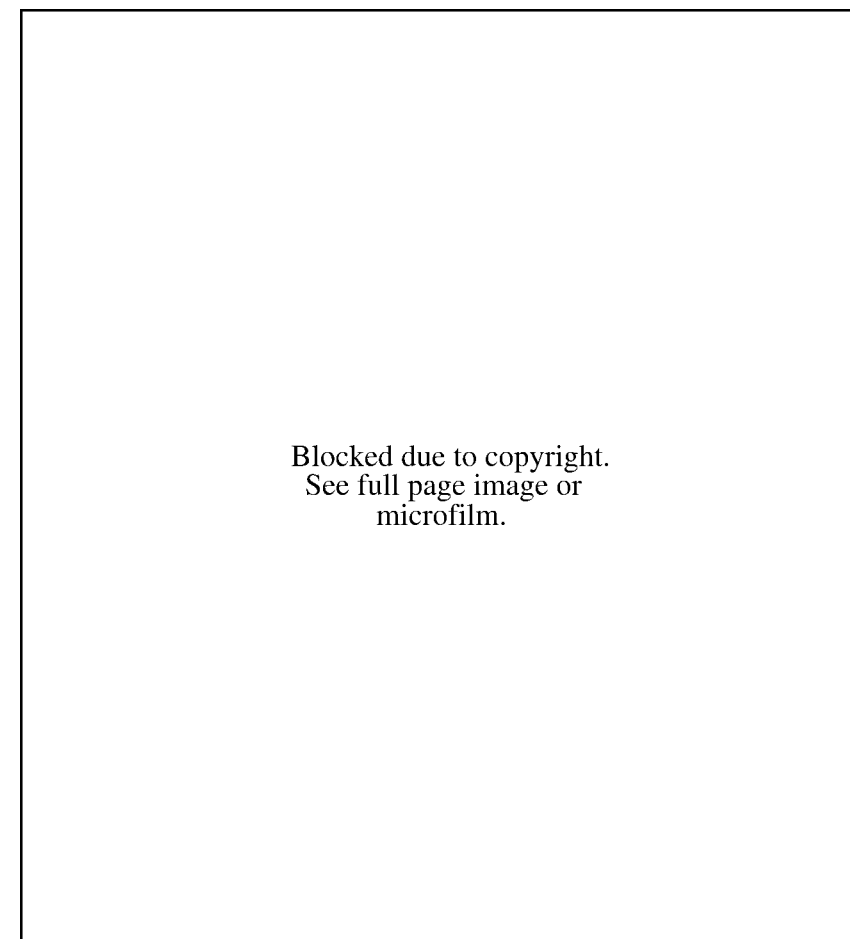
Spewing violent tirades against the United States, President Nasser had become top dog in a few weeks of brilliant psychological, military and political maneuvering. America's client—almost its ward—King Hussein of Jordan had made his pilgrimage to Cairo, the latter-day Canossa, and humbled himself before his new liege. Other West-looking Arab states, notably Morocco and Tunisia, had been forced into Nasser's camp. The fence-sitters had dropped down on his side. The future course of Saudi Arabia was not hard to forecast.

## Russia Came Close

AND THE REALITY behind all that was that the U.S.S.R. was within an inch of achieving its objective for the entire area. It was the effective power in the Middle East, the nation to which the Arab governments had to turn for permission to live or die. And no one would put money on how long the two other truly consequential states of the Middle East, Iran and Turkey, could hold out against it.

What Nasser, with Soviet support, accomplished in May, Israel undid in six days in June. The United States, to be sure, did not achieve the position the Soviet Union almost had. But its status in the area is better now than it has been for a decade. Elementary common sense, then, the Israelis argue, would be for the victors to sit tight for a while.

The position that both Israel and the United States find themselves in is eminently tolerable. It is not relatively expensive and it is not threatened by a new outbreak of war; the Arab states are totally incapable of resuming fighting and there are no signs that Russia



THE KANSAS CITY STAR

*"What gets me is those Israelis don't realize how much 'face' they've lost in this affair!"*

wants to play America's Vietnam role in the Middle East.

Compared to America's greatly reinforced military and diplomatic position, the price to be paid in oil and the closure of the Suez Canal is minimal and decreasing day by day. Indeed, in terms of the Vietnam war, the closing of the canal hurts Soviet shipments of weapons to Hanoi, not American shipments to Saigon.

Yet the situation, as Joseph Kraft noted in a recent column, "has bred the usual American itch to promote a settlement." The Israelis argue that it is time to put up with the itch, for scratching will not cure it but rather give a new lease on life to its cause.

The Israelis ascribe four reasons for what they fear is an American yearning to get a settlement before the conditions for a safe settlement exist:

- A characteristic American unhappiness over unwrapped packages, over unfinished business. America is uncomfortable about ball games that do not end and permit the score to be counted.

- A conviction that America dare not allow the Arab states to remain unhappy with it and that Washington feels that there should be a return to the notoriously unsuccessful policy of past years of trying to give the Arabs "somewhere else to turn to" than toward the Russians.

- Continued pressure from commer-

cial interests, principally oil, to restore old patterns.

- An American desire for an agreement with the Soviet Union on something, regardless of its contents or importance, in the belief that any settlement of anything with Russia is good per se.

What the Israelis say they must guard against, therefore, is what they have come to call a "third party" settlement cooked up by an enemy—say Tito, at the moment—but acceded to by the United States, which will join to put pressure on Israel to accept.

## Willingly Obnoxious

SUCH A SETTLEMENT would have a pattern easily foreseen: the granting to Israel of rights of navigation in the Suez Canal and the Gulf of Aqaba; some international declarations about its right of existence and legitimacy; some assurances about the security of its prewar borders—in return for Israel's withdrawal of its armed forces behind them.

Thus a new situation of "nonbelligerency" would ensue. And that, the Israelis reply, was the formal name for the situation that existed from 1957, after the Sinai war, until last June 5. And look where it led to.

Foreign Minister Abba Eban, who may not always speak the unanimous voice of his country, nevertheless did so earlier this month when he rejected the term "nonbelligerency." Let there be, he said, either peace, by treaties with the Arab countries that provide security for all and for which Israel will negotiate new borders, or else let there be what there is now, which is war with a cease-fire, something Israel can tolerate for a long time.

"In our insistence on this position," one of Eban's top officials said in a recent conversation, "We are prepared to be more obnoxious than you have ever known us. Our policy is surely not to be at loggerheads with the United States. But we will endure pressure and sanctions and whatever else before we will change what we have for anything less than peace directly negotiated with the Arabs."

Suppose, as the Israelis earnestly hope, the United States sees the situation as Israel does and puts up with the itch. What can be forecast for the future? No thoughtful official here thinks that Russia will abandon its strivings in

the area, but from that point on, opinions differ.

The optimists see the Soviet Union as ultimately deciding that it cannot afford the huge economic drain of supporting Egypt and Syria in their present state of belligerency and finally will force them to terms.

Some, like Eban, see the position of Egypt becoming so intolerable that it must agree to direct negotiations in a few months. Eban points out that always in the past, both Russia and the United Arab Republic bit the bullet when the resistance to them remained firm and there was no other way out. But the pessimists entertain no such hopes for early movement.

They point to what they consider Nasser's chief asset, the infinite capacity of his population to endure misery. With a continuation of some Soviet support, he and his allies can go on crying for a holy war, make demonstrations and rock along for a good while to come.

## An Optimistic View

IT MAY BE, therefore, that the present state of affairs in the Middle East will prevail for a long time. Israel surely has the patience and the capacity to endure it and the will to resist any proposals to restore the old situation, whatever the minor improvements, that led to war in June.

It argues that the old Western policy never forced the Arab states to face reality but always offered them some way out. It proposes that a new policy be tried which requires them to face the fact of Israel's existence and to deal with it.

In the interim, Israel thinks that it can take care of itself if it must but ardently wishes American support to help it along. What it fears is American demands for "movement," because the only movement contemplated is Israel's—backward from where it is.

When the compromise formulas are proposed, as they surely will be, and with covert Soviet and Arab backing, Israeli policy-makers hope that the United States will stand with it in exploding them or, if that is not possible, at least will not join in the clamor for accepting them. In that situation, the Israelis appeal in the terms of that old Brooklyn-Jewish expression: "Sammy, don't mix in."