

## **The fourth Arab-Israeli war**

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An Arab-Israeli war, the fourth in the lifetime of one generation, broke out in October 1973. In terms of tank battles, employment of anti-aircraft weapons and planes, casualties sustained by both sides and also in terms of the deliberate brutality of Israel's air raids

on Egyptian and Syrian towns, villages and non-military targets, the war surpassed all previous hostilities unleashed by Israel against its Arab neighbors.

The war started in a specific international situation. The conflict took a turn for the worse and entered a crisis stage at a time when there was a shift from cold war to détente and when normalization had begun in Soviet-American relations. For the first time in the history of the conflict, it became possible—due to both the new character of the armed confrontation and the new international climate—directly to link the UN Security Council decision on a cease-fire with the issue of eliminating the causes of the conflict, the Soviet Union playing a most active part in achieving this result.

The road to lasting peace in the Middle East will unquestionably be long and difficult in view of the present Israeli leadership's expansionist policy, which has become traditional, the persisting ambitions of Israel's militarists and the fact that this policy and these ambitions are backed by the U.S. imperialists. Nevertheless, there is now reason to look with greater optimism on the prospects of a political settlement. Speaking to the World Congress of Peace Forces in Moscow about the chances of a fair and durable peace in the Middle East, L. I. Brezhnev, General Secretary of the CC CPSU, said: 'Let me say that the Soviet Union is prepared to make and will make a constructive contribution to this matter. Our firm stand is that all the states and peoples in the Middle East—I repeat, all of them—must be assured of peace, security and the inviolability of borders. The Soviet Union is prepared to take part in the relevant guarantees.'

### *Causes of the war*

When, after the beginning of hostilities in October, Egyptian forces crossed the Suez Canal to Sinai and Syrian forces advanced to the Golan Heights, the Israeli leadership and Zionist and pro-Israeli quarters in other countries did their utmost to misrepresent the objectives of the two Arab countries, which set themselves a strictly limited task: to free by every means the lands seized by the Israeli militarists and create a more favorable atmosphere for a political settlement of the conflict. The Arab leaders' relevant statements were merely ignored in Israel. At the same time Prime Minister Golda Meir again accused the Arabs, on no grounds at all, of trying to 'liquidate Israel,' and the Chairman of the Knesset made a speech threatening 'the aggressor who has invaded our territory.' In this manner the Israeli leaders tried to bypass or completely eliminate the point at issue: the fact that the Arab armies had moved into Egyptian and Syrian territory overrun in June 1967 and forcibly occupied by Israel ever since, contrary to UN decisions and the demands of international opinion.

Tel Aviv at once betrayed a tendency to regard the fourth war in isolation, ignoring its logical connection with the previous evolution of the conflict. This approach distorts the picture and dis-

sembles the real cardinal causes of the new outbreak of the crisis. Yet it is of far more than academic interest to reveal the causes of the war, since how effective the quest for a real settlement in the Middle East will be depends largely on this.

The long-standing Arab-Israeli conflict is due to a number of causes.

First of all, it began, historically speaking, as a clash between Zionist doctrine and practice, on the one hand, and the interests of the Arab population of Palestine, on the other. The mainspring of the Zionist movement is often represented as the desire to 'transfer a people without a country into a country without a people.' This interpretation is entirely wrong. People of Jewish nationality had lived in many countries of the world for a long time and most of them regarded those countries as their homeland. Besides, by the time the idea of founding a Jewish state materialized, Palestine was by no means a 'country without a people.' As for Jews, there were only 84,000 of them living in Palestine in 1922, that is, they made up only about one-fifteenth of the population. The rise of Israel created the problem of numerous Palestinian refugees, most of whom have not become integrated into the life of other Arab countries. By 1966, or shortly before the 'six-day war,' which was followed by a new large wave of Arab refugees, the number of Palestinians who had abandoned their homes was set by the UN at 1.3 million.

Secondly, the meaning of the conflict is not restricted to the collision between Israel and the Palestinians, who are supported by other Arab peoples. Arab countries were involved in the conflict directly, and not only through their support of the Palestinian people's rights. As soon as Israel came into being, it made expansion at the expense of Arab neighbors state policy. Ben Gurion, its first prime minister, offered the following 'theoretical argument' in support of that policy - 'Every state consists of land and people. Israel is no exception but it cannot be identified with either its present area or its people. . . . It must now be said that Israel was created in only a small part of Israeli territory.' Events of the past quarter of a century have shown how this theory was carried into practice.

Thirdly, the evolution of the conflict was largely conditioned by the policy of the imperialists, especially those of the U.S. Support for Israel's policy of expansion served to consolidate and extend imperialist positions in the Middle East. Relations between foreign imperialists and the Israeli leadership were based on opposition to the dynamic progressive regimes established in the Arab world in the 50s and 60s. Imperialism seized on Israel's aggression in 1956 and 1967 as a means of doing away with national-liberation, progressive trends and processes in Egypt, Syria and other Arab countries.

Fourthly, in view of Israel's increasingly expansionist, aggressive policy, certain elements in Arab countries, for their part, adopted an extremist stance and called for the liquidation of that state. 'We

Arabs,' wrote M. H. Heikal, editor-in-chief of *Al Ahram*, the Cairo daily, after the 'six-day war,' 'did ourselves much political harm in the eyes of friend and foe alike. Israel talked of peace and made ready to fight. We talked of war but were unprepared for it. Yet the peoples of the world want no war. The Arabs' behavior before the aggression was seen by the world as irresponsible . . .'

The West widely exploited irresponsible and occasionally downright provocative statements by some Arab leaders to make believe that Israel was fighting for its very existence and that its foreign policy was intended to preserve that 'little island of civilization' in a 'raging Arab sea.' This description had nothing to do with reality. Israel has been, and remains, an active force meaningfully pursuing its expansionist aims. In the context of overall imperialist policy, Israel was a weapon against the vigorous processes of liberation and revolution in the Arab world in the middle of this century.

The above contradictions were the main general causes of the conflict. As for the crisis in October 1973, it was predetermined by certain aspects of the development of these contradictions shortly before the events.

After defeating the Arabs militarily in June 1967, the Israeli leadership set out to annex the Arab lands captured in the 'six-day war.' This policy expressed itself in the rise of numerous Israeli settlements in the occupied areas, in particular on the west bank of the Jordan, in the Gaza Strip and on the Golan Heights. The country's leaders did not deny that the settlements served the object of annexation. 'The new settlements in the occupied territories,' said Defense Minister Moshe Dayan, 'are like trees which have struck deep root in the soil and not like flowers in pots which can be shifted from place to place. No matter where we set up a community, we shall leave neither the community nor the place.' The occupation status was to be 'legalized,' according to Tel Aviv's plan, by municipal elections on the occupied lands, which actually took place in May 1972.

Israel's ruling party took a demonstrative decision shortly before the fourth war by including in its election program a provision for the sale and lease of land in the occupied Arab territories. This was to become, in effect, part of the political program of the Israel government to be formed after the elections set for early November. Even the *Washington Post*, which is anything but unsympathetic towards the Israeli leadership, called the decision 'a long step towards permanent annexation of a major part of the territories won from its Arab neighbors in 1967.'

At the same time the Israeli leadership flatly refused to recognize the legitimate rights of the Arab people of Palestine. To judge from official Israeli statements, it was determined to ignore all UN resolutions recognizing the Palestinians' right to return to their homeland or adequate compensation for those who might decide against returning.

It follows that Israel's policy directly prevented a political settlement of the conflict. Ignoring international opinion and resolutions of the UN Security Council and General Assembly, the Israeli leaders concentrated—politically, economically and militarily—on preserving and consolidating the results of the 1967 aggression. Tel Aviv virtually rejected every initiative likely to 'unfreeze' the conflict and resolve it on a fair basis, in the interests of all the peoples of the region. Israel gave a negative reply to the memorandum of Gunnar Jarring, special representative of the UN Secretary General, who proposed that Tel Aviv assume definite commitments to carry out all the provisions of the Security Council resolution of November 22, 1967. By advancing unacceptable demands, Israel torpedoed Egypt's initiative (February 1971) aimed at reopening the Suez Canal for international shipping. This policy of obstruction was supported with constant acts of aggression by the Israeli military clique against Arab neighbors.

International imperialist and reactionary quarters, primarily those of the U.S., backed this Israeli stand. They expected that the 'freezing' of the conflict and the creation of a 'no war, no peace' situation would make for a general swing to the right in the Arab world, increasingly weaken revolutionary democratic regimes, deepen rifts between Arab countries, make it easier for frankly reactionary and right-nationalist Arab forces to maneuver and strengthen chauvinist and ultra-Islamic trends, which were assuming an anti-Soviet and anti-Communist character.

Some Arab countries searched for a constructive political settlement of the crisis based on a compromise. On February 15, 1971, Egypt stated in its reply to Jarring's memorandum that if Israel withdrew its troops from the occupied Arab territories it would be willing to carry out all the measures listed in the memorandum, specifically to end the state of war with Israel; cooperate in setting up demilitarized zones on both sides of the frontier; agree to the stationing of UN troops at a number of points; accept the great powers' guarantees of the frontiers of all states of the region, including Israel; prevent the use of Egyptian territory for purposes hostile to other countries; guarantee freedom of shipping for all countries on all the sea routes of the area, including the Suez Canal. However, every constructive step proposed by the Arab side was intransigently rejected by Israel.

At the threshold of the 1973 war, the Arab countries' economic and political difficulties born of the aggression were increasing visibly. Egypt was compelled to keep a mass army and spend about 1,000m. Egyptian pounds per year on defense. Syria's defense spending claimed 60 per cent of its budget appropriations. Many observers noted that the delay in settlement might generate an acute political crisis in both countries. The situation was aggravated by a marked intensification of Israeli provocations along the cease-fire line. There were numerous reports in September about Israeli troop concentrations on the east bank of the Suez Canal and in

the area of the Golan Heights. Early in October Israel called up its reservists, which heated the situation to the utmost.

It was in these conditions that the war broke out on October 6.

### *Results of the war*

The 20 days' fighting (the war did not really come to a halt until three days after the adoption of the Security Council resolution on a cease-fire) was widely reported in the world press. Within the scope of this article it is hardly worth studying the finer points of the military communiqués concerning the successes or failures of one side or the other. Still, some conclusions can be drawn regarding the results of the war as a whole, its impact on the Arab-Israeli conflict and the possibilities of a future settlement.

Probably the main conclusion is the collapse of the Israeli military doctrine based on the assumption of Israel's capability to strike at the Arab countries when and where it chooses without fear of suffering any appreciable losses. The doctrine (of which the Israeli leadership's political line is, in effect a projection) was based on 'continued Arab inability' to offer any significant resistance to the Israeli war machine, let alone achieve 'local' success in any confrontation. In the Israeli military's view, 'unlimited' superiority over the Arab countries was assured by 'unchallenged' air superiority. And only last July, General Sharon was saying: 'Israel is a superpower . . . Within a week we could conquer the whole area from Khartoum to Baghdad and Algiers.'

The October hostilities not only deflated such boasts but, more importantly, challenged the theoretical constructions of the Israeli General Staff. According to unofficial figures from Israeli sources, in the first two weeks of the war Israel lost 30,000 men killed and wounded, 900 tanks, and 250 aircraft or about one-half of its air force. Of course, the Arabs suffered heavily, too, but the vast disparity in human reserves places Israel at a special disadvantage.

Another result of the war which will doubtlessly have its impact on the future, is the Arabs' overcoming of the psychological barrier created by the military defeat of 1967, recurrent Israeli 'dagger strikes' since the 'six-day-war,' and Western claims of the Arab states' inability to offer serious military resistance to Israel. It should also be stressed that the psychological barrier was surmounted on the basis of a realistic assessment of the true balance of military forces which, Arab leaders hold, does not yet favor the Arab countries.

Nevertheless, the latest round of fighting has registered a distinct change. As the American UPI agency reported from London, Western experts have come to the conclusion that the military balance in the Middle East had been judged incorrectly. The old assessments of imperialist governments had always been based on Israel's superiority over Egypt and Syria in the air and in the quality of its armaments and the ability to use them. This view is now being revised.

The change in the military balance, coupled with the Arabs' overcoming of the psychological barrier and their vital concern for liquidating the consequences of the Israeli aggression, can create an entirely new situation in the confrontation. This is something the Israeli leadership will have to reckon with if, contrary to common sense, it persists in its policy of opposing a political settlement.

One important result of the war is the swing away from Israel in the international climate. Most indicative in this respect is the stand of West European countries. The nine EEC countries have issued a statement calling for a political settlement of the Mideast conflict on the basis of the November 1967 Security Council resolution. Britain and France have imposed embargos on weapons supplies to the belligerents, including Israel. And the FRG has refused the United States permission to use its territory for its arms airlift to Israel.

An important consideration behind the stand of the West European countries is their dependence on Arab oil imports, which cover around 80 per cent of their requirements. When, during the hostilities, the Arab states announced their intention to reduce oil production month by month until Israel relinquished the territories occupied in 1967, the outlook for West European consumers became gloomy indeed. The West European position was additionally influenced by the decision of some Arab states to raise the price of crude oil.

But oil was not the only factor in determining the stand of Western Europe during the October war. Displeasure is steadily mounting, at least among the major countries, with Israel's inflexible, adventurist policy and U.S. support for it. Differences were further exacerbated when the U.S. put its armed forces around the world, including bases in Europe, on alert without first consulting its NATO allies. As the West German *General-Anzeiger* wrote, 'The United States' West-European partners have never been so peeved by the brusque style of American politics.'

Israel's mounting isolation was underscored by the breaking off of diplomatic relations by 24 African countries during the fighting.

A result of the fourth Arab-Israel war is a higher level of solidarity and cooperation of Arab countries in the struggle against Israeli aggression. For the first time Israel was forced to fight a real war on two fronts. For the first time the capitalist world has been confronted with the threat of Arab countries really using oil as a weapon in the struggle for their legitimate rights. For the United States, with its policy of direct support for Israel, the result has been the virtually total suspension of oil deliveries from the Arab world. In conditions of the mounting 'energy crisis' in the U.S., Arab use of the 'oil weapon' is all the more effective.

And finally, the events have meant a serious defeat for the forces bent on undermining the friendship between the Arab countries and the Soviet Union and other socialist states. The series of anti-Soviet myths dutifully peddled by imperialist and reactionary Arab elements, from fabrications about the quality of the weapons used

by the Egyptian and Syrian armies to claims that the Soviet Union had 'retreated' from its principled position of support for the Arab peoples' just struggle to liquidate the consequences of the Israeli aggression, has been completely refuted.

### *Effects of détente*

The present round of hostilities in the Middle East began at a time of normalization of relations between the countries belonging to the two opposing world systems. This had a direct impact on the events. To the Soviet Union détente has never meant the abrogation of the class character of its foreign policy. This is wholly reflected in its stand of resolute support for the forces fighting against Israeli aggression.

As is known, at the time of the 1973 talks between CPSU General Secretary L. I. Brezhnev and President Nixon, the Soviet Union's policy remained that of combing normalization of relations with the United States and détente with a search for a just settlement of the Middle East conflict. It was on the insistence of the Soviet Union that the U.S. agreed to include the statement on recognition of the Palestinian people's legitimate rights in the text of the joint Soviet-American communique.

After the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East the Soviet Union, while supporting the Arab countries in their armed struggle for the liberation of the occupied territories, used every opportunity at its disposal to seek a political settlement of the conflict based on Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories. A major achievement of the Soviet Union's principled, active policy was the Soviet-American resolution adopted by the Security Council on October 22, which directly linked the call for a ceasefire with the practical implementation of the 1967 resolution. The Security Council's new resolution also provided for immediate political talks between the parties concerned under suitable auspices. This was a major step towards the settlement of the Mideast conflict in the interests of all states and peoples of the region, in the interests of universal peace.

The Soviet Union continued its energetic pursuit of a just and lasting peace after Israel's ruling circles, having declared their acceptance of the Soviet-American resolution, deceitfully violated it. On October 23, the Security Council categorically repeated its call for a ceasefire. The Soviet Union's active stand contributed to the adoption of the October 25 resolution providing for the creation of a United Nations emergency force. Speaking at the Peace Congress in Moscow, Comrade L. I. Brezhnev announced that at the request of President Sadat the Soviet Union had dispatched a group of observers to Egypt in furtherance of the Security Council's ceasefire resolution. Following this initiative, the United States was also compelled to send observers to the Middle East.

While actively seeking a political settlement on conditions discouraging aggression, the Soviet Union neutralized U.S. attempts to pressure it away from its firm line aimed at ending hostilities and



restoring peace in the Middle East. As a result of the Soviet Union's principled stand the U.S. retracted its purely demonstrative move of alerting its armed forces on October 25-26.

Many bourgeois observers have noted that the combination of the Soviet Union's constructive policy of continued détente with principled support of the Arab countries' just struggle to liquidate the consequences of Israel's aggression had a profound impact on the position of Washington. As a consequence, and also because the hostilities had demonstrated the growing ability of the Arab states, with the support of the socialist countries, to buttress their resistance to the aggressors and inflict palpable losses, U.S. ruling circles were compelled to make some readjustments in their Mideast policy. They were also prompted by the Arab countries' concerted and much more effective use of the 'oil weapon' against countries supporting Israel. It was not, of course, a question of the United States' refusing to support Israel: this was amply demonstrated by the airlift to compensate for Israel's losses and strengthen its war machine, President Nixon's message to Congress requesting 2.2 billion dollars for urgent aid to Israel, and the redeployment of the American Sixth Fleet, reinforced with aircraft carriers, to the eastern part of the Mediterranean. At the same time, however, the situation has forced the appearance of some new elements in the United States' stand which may have a positive effect in the search for a settlement. The Soviet Union, of course, took these new positive elements into account in its contacts with the United States on a Middle East settlement.

The latest round of fighting in the Middle East has demonstrated more clearly than ever before that perpetuation of the situation as it was when the fighting started, that is, Israel's continued occupation of Arab lands, is fraught with continued new outbreaks which can result not only in huge sacrifices and destruction for the countries of the region, but also seriously harm the policy of détente and create a real threat to universal peace.

Settlement of the Middle East conflict is in keeping with the tasks of continued détente, peace and security, with the interests of people all around the world.

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