Six-Day War  
Opposition Brief by Micah Chapman



The Six-Day War is undoubtedly the most prominent application used in Stoa Lincoln-Douglas debate this year. It shows up nearly every round. Debaters use this application (usually on the affirmative) as an example of preemptive warfare. With the application pool in this resolution being so limited (as there are very few instances of true preemptive warfare), this application has quickly become the go-to example for new and experienced debaters alike. Before we address responses to this example, we must understand the situation fully.

In 1967, Egypt and Jordan signed a mutual defense pact enforcing unity against their common enemy Israel. For years, Arab states had insisted on denying Israel’s sovereignty—even Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser at one point vowed to destroy Israel’s livelihood. This defense pact created a military coalition that outnumbered the Israeli army, making it seemingly possible for the Arab countries to finally mobilize and attack. At the end of spring in 1967, Arab forces began moving near the edge of the Israeli border. On June 5, 1967, Israel preemptively launched fighter planes and caught the Arab militaries unaware, allowing the planes to almost completely destroy Egypt, Jordan, and Syria’s air forces in a single day.

The argument here, as is most commonly run on the affirmative, is that Israel was able to detect an imminent enemy attack and use a preemptive strike to win the war quickly and with minimal damage (hence the war being six days long).

This is, admittedly, an extremely persuasive argument. It is an instance of supposed preemptive warfare being executed to near perfection. Now all the affirmative has to do is pretend like a majority of preemptive warfare is as clean and effective as Israel’s was.

As persuasive as this example is, it has a few crucial shortcomings.

Opposition Brief: Six-Days War

# 1. Not Preemptive

## a. Egypt Took Land

*DailyHistory.org, 2016. December 5, 2016, “How Did the 1967 War Shape the Middle East?”* [*https://dailyhistory.org/How\_Did\_the\_1967\_War\_Shape\_the\_Middle\_East%3F*](https://dailyhistory.org/How_Did_the_1967_War_Shape_the_Middle_East%3F)

“In early 1967, Syria and Israel had been fighting about water rights (specifically the Jordan River). As a show of pan-Arabism (a secular Arab identity), Egyptian President Gamal Nasser blocked Israeli from accessing the Red Sea for shipping. Israelis viewed this as an act of war since the entrance to the Red Sea was considered to be an international waterway.”

**Analysis:** When Nasser (the Egyptian president) blocked Israel’s legal access to the Red Sea, he initiated an act of war. Israel’s attack is therefore reactionary, as they only attacked because of the actions initiated by Egypt.

## b. Troops Were Precautionary

*Foreign Policy Journal, 2010. Jeremy R. Hammond, July 4th, 2010, “Israel’s attack on Egypt in June ’67 was not ‘preemptive’”* [*https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive*](https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive)

**“**It is often claimed that Israel’s attack on Egypt that began the June 1967 “Six Day War” was a “preemptive” one. Implicit in that description is the notion that Israel was under imminent threat of an attack from Egypt. Yet this historical interpretation of the war is not sustained by the documentary record. The President of Egypt, then known as the United Arab Republic (UAR), Gamal Abdel Nasser, later conveyed to U.S. President Lyndon Johnson that his troop buildup in the Sinai Peninsula prior to the war had been to defend against a feared Israeli attack… Additionally, the CIA assessed that Nasser’s military presence in the Sinai was defensive, stating that “Armored striking forces could breach the UAR’s double *defense* line in the Sinai”

**Analysis:** Both the CIA and Nassar himself agree that the troops massed on Israel’s border were for defensive purposes. If that is the case, Nassar was never planning on attacking Israel, and the strike was not preemptive.

## c. Threat Was Minimal

*Foreign Policy Journal, 2010. Jeremy R. Hammond, July 4th, 2010, “Israel’s attack on Egypt in June ’67 was not ‘preemptive’”* [*https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive*](https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive)

**“**Neither U.S. nor Israeli intelligence assessed that there was any kind of serious threat of an Egyptian attack. On the contrary, both considered the possibility that Nasser might strike first as being extremely slim. The current Israeli Ambassador to the U.S., Michael B. Oren, acknowledged in his book ‘Six Days of War’, widely regarded as the definitive account of the war, that ‘By all reports Israel received from the Americans, and according to its own intelligence, Nasser had no interest in bloodshed’.”

**Analysis:** The U.S and Israel’s intelligence both concluded that there was essentially no threat from the Arab states. This attack, therefore, was not preemptive.

## d. Quote From Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin In 1982:

*Foreign Policy Journal, 2010. Jeremy R. Hammond, July 4th, 2010, “Israel’s attack on Egypt in June ’67 was not ‘preemptive’”* [*https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive*](https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive)

“In June 1967 we again had a choice. The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”

# 2. Israel Would Have Won

*Foreign Policy Journal, 2010. Jeremy R. Hammond, July 4th, 2010, “Israel’s attack on Egypt in June ’67 was not ‘preemptive’”* [*https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive*](https://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2010/07/04/israels-attack-on-egypt-in-june-67-was-not-preemptive)

“On May 23, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms presented Johnson with the CIA’s assessment that Israel could ‘defend successfully against simultaneous Arab attacks on all fronts … or hold on any three fronts while mounting successfully a major offensive on the fourth.’ In an document entitled ‘Military Capabilities of Israel and the Arab States’, the CIA assessed that ‘Israel could almost certainly attain air supremacy over the Sinai Peninsula in less than 24 hours after taking the initiative or in two or three days if the UAR struck first’… Although the Arabs had numerical superiority in terms of military hardware, ‘Nonetheless, the IDF [Israeli Defense Force] maintain qualitative superiority over the Arab armed forces in almost all aspects of combat operations.’”

**Analysis:** If Israel would have easily won the war even without a preemptive attack, then there is nothing unique about preemption that gives a country any advantage. Some wars are won not because of the strategy, but because one military is superior to another. The Six-Days War is an example of that.

# 3. Bolstered PLO

*DailyHistory.org, 2016. “How Did the 1967 War Shape the Middle East?”* [*https://dailyhistory.org/How\_Did\_the\_1967\_War\_Shape\_the\_Middle\_East%3F*](https://dailyhistory.org/How_Did_the_1967_War_Shape_the_Middle_East%3F)

“The loss of the Sinai Peninsula, the Gaza Strip, and, more importantly, President Nasser’s loss of political credibility were particularly detrimental to Egypt. No longer did Nasser’s dream of pan-Arabism seem possible after such a concerted failure by Arab states to defend Palestinians. It was in the atmosphere of failed pan-Arabism that the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) gained a stronger foothold under their leader, Yasir Arafat.”

**Analysis:** The aftermath of the Six-Day War was not all positive. This war led to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (or just Palestine), a terrorist group who still terrorizes Israel to this day, to gain a stronger foothold.