"liberal" settlers, resulting in a complicated and ultimately more interesting picture of the growing Israeli settler project.

GUY LARON, *The Six-Day War: The Breaking of the Middle East* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017). Pp. 384. $28.00 cloth. ISBN: 9780300222708

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The Trump Administration's formal recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital in late 2017 evoked memories of the Arab–Israeli war of June 1967. Yet controversies over how to interpret, understand, and commemorate this event came close to the rancor and fierceness of historiographical debates between Israeli "New Historians" and their antagonists about earlier wars. One might have expected an avalanche of new publications on the 1967 war, taking into account the to-be-expected marketability around its fifty-year anniversary. The actual output in both quantity and quality, however, is rather underwhelming.

All the more gratifying is the publication of Guy Laron's comprehensive monograph on the origins of the 1967 war. Laron has succeeded in writing the best-documented and most convincing account of this war to date. Most impressive is the meticulous multiarchival research undertaken. Laron weaves a wide array of sources from Israel, Arab states, the United States, Russia, and Eastern European states into a fascinating and complex narrative, and he develops an original and well-argued interpretation of what caused this seminal war. He has a great flair for extracting captivating quotations from his many sources. In terms of comprehensiveness by empirical research, Laron's work sets the standard for many years to come.

What distinguishes Laron's work from previous accounts such as the popular but questionable and agenda-driven work by Michael Oren is his declared intention to investigate underlying and structural factors, aiming for a "long-term inquiry into the roots of the war" (p. 2), as he puts it. In order to identify those roots, Laron unveils a well-balanced and penetrating account of the internal politics and the overall economic and social developments inside three of the four main belligerent powers, including Israel, Egypt, and Syria (Jordan's role isn't covered in depth), during the 1960s. His main thesis for the outbreak is a transformative change of civil–military relations in all three countries, notwithstanding differences between their political systems, and a loss of political control over the military leadership which comprised prominent figures who "designed and even desired" war (p. 2). Jumping back and forth between the three capitals, Laron weaves concurrent developments in these states into a master narrative. He details the brutal internal power struggle between Baʿthists and the Muslim Brothers and the sequence of successful and failed coup attempts in Damascus. He also analyzes the travails of the Eshkol government faced with economic stagnation and a boastful military establishment, and the frustrations of Jamal ʿAbd al-Nasir about his declining ambitions for regional leadership and Egyptian Great Power status. Regional dynamics played an important role in these shifts of the internal balances of power as did the catalyzing role of superpower patrons all too willing to provide staggering amounts of arms and military goods to their clients, thereby exacerbating tensions and, additionally, a global economic and balance-of-payments crisis.

Laron explicitly emulates Christopher Clark's approach of switching interpretative angles in his seminal work on World War I, *The Sleepwalkers* (New York: HarperCollins, 2013). This makes for entertaining reading but it also seems oddly unfitting. The regional setup in the

1967 Middle East with its overtaxed statesmen and fumbling generals, its reckless rhetoric and military automatisms, and its overall absence of any kind of trust superficially might resemble *fin de siècle* Europe. However, apart from being only a miniscule skirmish in comparison, the 1967 war lacked the total character of World War I. On the contrary, given the systemic salience of the superpowers, it resembles an astonishingly confined affair. Laron provides plenty of evidence: military planning aimed for quick victories within a few days before anticipated ceasefire enforcement by the big powers; ʿAbd al-Nasir's main intention seems to have been to (re)internationalize the conflict; the main concern inside Israeli cabinet decisions were not military outcomes but Washington's disapproval.

Herein lies the main criticism. Laron rightly identifies internal instability and economic distress, a weakening of civilian control, and arms races and transfers as accelerating the drive towards war. These are all sufficient conditions for the war; but are they necessary ones as well? Laron's evidence strongly points at alternative hypotheses. All actors in his narrative convey an impression of recklessness, but only one actor—Israel—had the will and the capacity to start and win an actual war. Laron's most important finding is the relentless pressure of Israeli generals on civilian leadership to provoke a war with neighboring Arab forces in order to expand the borders of the young state, both to improve its defensibility and to conquer territory. Historiographical debates such as the Soviet warning of an imminent Israeli assault on Syria are of subordinate importance as the momentum swung towards a military solution. The IDF, in fact, had prepared for the administrative takeover of the West Bank since 1963 and had even appointed a future military governor (p. 109). Chief of Staff Yitzhak Rabin repeatedly pressed for conquering the Golan and intended to bring down the Syrian government through a series of military attacks (p. 144). And the military vetoed promising defensive measures against guerilla infiltrations as they feared legitimizing borders "they aimed to change at the next available opportunity" (p. 140).

Even when one gives appropriate weight to bureaucratic politics, contingency, public sentiments, and deficient personalities, Laron's evidence strongly supports one basic conclusion: the Six Day War was a war of choice by Israel. He never states this unambiguously despite all the convincing evidence he assembles. This ambivalence is hard to understand but might be a result of the much-changed political and academic atmosphere in Israel compared to the times of the New Historians. More baffling is that Laron himself decided to forward another hypothesis with respect to the 1967 war in a separate article. Here, contrary to the findings in his book, he unmistakably rejects the thesis of a planned Egyptian military first strike, and advocates that ʿAbd al-Nasir's gambit was a political ploy based on strategic signaling which went totally amiss. "For Israel, the Six Day War was a war of choice," Laron concludes in the article ("Was Israel Under Existential Threat in June 1967?," *CounterPunch*. 6 June 1967, accessed 6 April 2018, https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/06/06/was-israel-under-existential-threat-in-june-1967/).

At times, the editing is sloppy: Deputy Assistant Secretary John Jernegan is misspelled as "Jarnegan" (p. 92). The ship USS Liberty is mistakenly printed as "SS Liberty" (p. 304). Finally, historians might find fault with some interpretations. The State Department in 1963 certainly did not regard "with equanimity an annexation of Jordan by Nasser's Egypt" (p. 91), indeed quite the opposite. The Shah of Iran did, in fact, conclude an arms agreement with the Soviet Union in early 1967 (p. 198). And the decision to omit mentioning altogether the bombing of American targets in Egypt by Israeli agents in the course of the false-flag covert operation known as the Lavon affair, is, to put it mildly, disingenuous (p. 98).

But this should not distract from Laron's accomplishment. Notably, his findings on Israeli motives are diametrically opposed to the majority of previous accounts and he corrects long-held convictions about an inadvertent war. His richly documented and diligently balanced account will help supersede and overcome the many aberrations bred by agenda-driven and ahistorical earlier accounts of this war.