

Hungary and the Arab-Israeli War of 1967



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ABSTRACT

During the outbreak of the six-day „blitzkrieg” on 5 June 1967, the Arab world was severely defeated. The defeat also signified the failure of the allies of Egypt and Syria: the Soviet Union and the socialist countries as well. Hungarian political leaders continued to offer their support to the Arab nations affected by the Israeli aggression, however, they also criticised certain Arab politicians (Syrians and the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization – PLO) for their extremist, reckless and often demagogic statements. International public opinion was mixed. Some elements were sceptical about support for the Arabs as they were badly defeated in a short time in contrast to the heroic fight for Vietnamese independence in the early 1950s. The authors of the present article searched Hungarian archive records (reports of the embassies in Damascus, Moscow and Cairo), the documents of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party and the Hungarian-Egyptian daily press including Népszabadság,¹ Népszava,² al-Ahram,³ Rose al-Yusuf,⁴ al-Messa,⁵ and The Egyptian Gazette.⁶

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Hungary and the Causes of the Blitzkrieg

The history of events of the “Six-Day War” (“The Third Arab-Israeli War”) is widely known. However, opinions about the causes of the outbreak differ. A common position among historians is that the war broke out “accidentally” as a result of the interplay of several misinterpretations of actions. The growing tension of the “Arab Cold War”, the hesitation of the great powers, the extremist views of the leader of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), the lack of realistic and balanced analysis of the situation, and trends of expansive politics in Israeli government circles were also contributing factors. It is also believed that Soviet political leadership encouraged Egypt to trigger the war. According to Primakov,⁷ the Middle East correspondent of the Soviet party newspaper *Pravda*, who was also well-connected to

Gamal Abdel Nasser,⁸ it could not have been more than the Egyptian leaders’ misinterpretation of the unfortunate statements of Marshal Grechko, Commander-in-Chief of the Warsaw Pact Forces, who was visiting Cairo. Having inspected the Egyptian army, Grechko stated, “it can successfully solve various problems at the battleground.”⁹

In the second half of the 1960s, the main source of international tension was the war of the USA in Vietnam that radicalised the anti-USA forces in the world and those, as well, who believed in the quick solution of social issues even at the cost of using violence. This perspective was even propagated by Maoist China, mainly in the Third World, during the revolutionary fever of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution, through the attack of the Soviet “revisionism”. The example of Vietnam successfully standing against the super modern military technology of the USA made the impression that a

“people’s war” mobilising the whole population – as Che Guevara stated – would result in (or rather provoke) more success like Vietnam, and could defeat the leading power of the capitalist world.

The Arab world had his own Vietnam: North Yemen, where 50,000 Egyptian soldiers reinforced the republicans in their fight against the royalists backed by Saudi support, as it were, without a decisive outcome. The tension in the Eastern Mediterranean region was further increased by the Greek-Turkish conflict in Cyprus, which led to the “Regime of the Colonels” with some help from the CIA, in April 1967, in Greece.

The Arab world presented a complex, unsettling picture and was characterised by unprecedented divisions. Following the international cold war trend, they split into “progressives” and “reactionaries”. The former aimed to rally around Nasser and Egypt while the others followed the leadership of Saudi-Arabia. This division was favourable for those who hoped to find a solution to the serious problem of Palestine and, in their line of politics, wanted to lean on the socialist countries who were significantly committed in the region in every aspect.

The Hungarian government viewed the tension in the region with alarm over the extremist and provocative conduct of the Syrian government. However, it didn’t pay particular attention to the Palestinian problem, yet, but was aware of its significance at least from the time of a document issued in 1966 by the Foreign Ministry classifying it as “a key question in the Arab-Israeli relation”.¹⁰

The Damascus leadership coming into power in February 1966 gave reason for serious concerns in the already tense region. This neo-Ba’athist military group was very impatient both in internal and foreign affairs. Referring to the example of the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962) and the fighting in Vietnam, they proclaimed a “people’s war” not only against Israel, but also against Jordan and Saudi Arabia, which they labelled as reactionist. They considered overturning their social structure as a first step towards liberating Palestine. In November 1966, Prime Minister Yusuf Zuayyin¹¹ suggested to Nasser at a conference with the Egyptian leaders that they had to make the armistice with Israel unstable in every aspect. In other words, they needed to provoke Tel-Aviv. In case a war broke out and the Israeli army reached Damascus or Cairo, they would do so against well-armed people. Nasser was shocked to hear the Syrian leader: “What you suggest is the best way to our defeat. You must understand that we wouldn’t only face Jordan or Saudi Arabia in this case, but the USA as well, who is only interested in two things in the Arab world: primarily in Israel, then oil.”¹² Nasser proposed a

defence pact that they signed later. However, the Syrian leaders were looking for an excuse for a conflict with Israel in spite of Nasser’s warning and exhortation to restraint.

The situation intensified in May when the tension was so high that the international community started to worry. On 13 May, Moscow sent a report to Cairo including information on the Israeli’s intention to rally several divisions near the Syrian border. The fact that Israel held a military parade in Jerusalem on the national holiday, 15 May, also seemed to confirm the signs of activity of preparing for war. Meanwhile, Tel Aviv was concerned with Egypt’s request to draw back the UN forces from the armistice demarcation line, so, in the event a possible attack against Syria occurred, they would be in close combat position against the Israeli army. Two Egyptian aircraft flying above Dimona’s nuclear reactor on 17 May, and the Israeli’s inability to intercept them, however, caused rising alarm in governmental circles. But Nasser didn’t intend to start a war, he was only ready to take defensive steps and exert pressure. He categorically rejected the plan of Marshall Abdel Hakim Amer,¹³ his vice-president, for an offensive war.

Nasser’s steps were interpreted in Israel as a preparation for unleashing a war, and were highly exaggerated and overstressed in their propaganda even though they were aware that the leader of Egypt didn’t want to get into war. This was later admitted by Israeli politicians. In an interview with Eric Rouleau, the French *Le Monde* correspondent, which attracted wide attention both at home and abroad, Yitzhak Rabin, the actual Chief of the General Staff, said, “I do not think Nasser wanted war. The two divisions which he sent to the Sinai, on May 14, would not have been sufficient to start an offensive against Israel. He knew it and we knew it.” Moreover, the far-right Menachem Begin, a true believer of preventive war, admitted without further ado in 1982: “The Egyptian army concentrations in the Sinai did not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him.”¹⁴

At the same time, the Israelis, as well, nearly provoked the neighbouring countries, particularly Syria, using the tried and tested tactic of “fait accompli”. The main point of this tactic is that the basis is always given by the current situation, and the reason behind the situation is never important. Commander Moshe Dayan¹⁵ confidentially shared in 1976: “I know how at least 80 percent of the clashes there started. It went this way: We would send a tractor to plow earth in some plot you couldn’t do anything with, in a demilitarized zone, knowing in advance the Syrians would start shooting. If they

didn't shoot, we would tell the tractor to go farther, until finally the Syrians lose their temper and shoot. And then we'd fire back, and later send in the Air Force."¹⁶

The reckless, potentially misinterpreting and distorting statements and utterances of the Arab media (mainly the Sawt al-Arab 'Voice of the Arabs' radio station)¹⁷ and certain Syrian and Palestine politicians (particularly Ahmed Asaad al-Shukeiri,¹⁸ leader of the PLO) to crush Israel evoked the nightmare of a new Holocaust for the Israelis. Tel Aviv ably took advantage of it, and could get much of the public opinion of the world (mostly of Western Europe) accept that the existence of the Jewish state was at stake. This was never Nasser's purpose. He considered the situation before 1956 as a basis, however, his propaganda unintentionally referred to the situation before 1948. This extremely negative propaganda seriously strengthened the supporters of war in Israel. On the other hand, politicians (David Ben-Gurion,¹⁹ too) were only willing to risk an armed conflict with the support of the USA which they didn't unequivocally get from Washington. President Johnson recognised the blockade of the Gulf of Aqaba as a potential *casus belli*²⁰ – violation of the right to free shipping – and at the same time tried to dissuade Israel from starting a war. The Israelis – who understood their military advantage just like the USA or de Gaulle did – concentrated on only the first part of this ambiguous point of view.

Nasser, however, concentrated on the second part of President Johnson's opinion which was stressed by the official statements of Washington as well. Not even the British could clearly stand with a sable-rattling Israel. De Gaulle, too, specifically warned them not to go into war. The French president ordered the cessation of transportation of weapons to the region and pronounced that the first attacker would be marked as the aggressor. Moscow evidently supported Egypt and Syria. All these were more than enough for the leader of Egypt. However, as Nasser believed that the situation in 1956 was happening again, he was mistaken about thinking "Israel is a puppet state of the USA".²¹ It should be noted that Moscow shared his opinion as it was expressed in the statement of the Soviet government on 24 May "There are imperialist circles standing behind Israel."²² But the Israel of 1967 and that of 11 years prior were not the same anymore. According to Tom Segev, a well-known Israeli writer and historian, the Six Day War was the triumph of the Sabras (those who were born in Israel) over the "old" Jews, the survivors of the Holocaust, and it signified the end of social democratic Zionism as well as the coming of a new national religious era.²³

The Israeli airstrike in the morning of 5 June, 1967 – between 7 and 8 a.m. – was disastrous, 304 out of 419 aircraft were destroyed. Up to 12 noon it totalled 450 of which 304 were not even in the air. General Weizman,²⁴ IDF's Deputy Chief of Staff, called his wife at 10 a.m. and said "We won."²⁵ The catastrophic defeat in such a short time surprised everyone including the participants. Soon after the war ended, Aziz Mohamed,²⁶ the first general secretary of the Iraqi Communist Party noted at a conference with Árpád Pullai, the secretary of the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, "The situation in the Middle East surprised them. They knew that the Arab countries had some serious weaknesses, but didn't expect a defeat of such magnitude and in such short period of time."²⁷

The War of 1967 in the Hungarian Press

The role of the printed media has progressively emerged in the past century since most of the people get information on the affairs at local and broader level from the press. Some of the newspapers deal with military, economic, political and public life issues, or cultural and other specific questions.²⁸ Here we focus on the picture of the War of 1967 in the Hungarian press: how Hungarian journalists and editors saw and reflected on the defeat.

From May, newspapers in Hungary devoted much attention to the Middle East, the Syrian-Egyptian defence arrangements, the retreat of the UN forces, the decision of 18 May, 1967 on closing the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli ships on the Red Sea, which came to effect on 23 May, etc. They quoted the pugnacious statements of the Syrian president, Atassi, e.g., "At Israel's first offensive approach, we will unleash our revolutionary war."²⁹

The Hungarian closely followed the news about the War of 1967 closely adding military and political analyses. The readers had the first news of the war in the 6 June, 1967 issue of *Népszava*, that had reports on the outbreak of the armed conflict in the Middle East, on the UNSC holding an emergency special session and on people demanding the termination of aggression all over the world.³⁰ The next day, the same paper along with many other Hungarian newspapers published the Hungarian statement about the sites of combat in the Middle East. This issue also gave news on the UNSC's meeting, including the call for an immediate cease-fire and the request of the Soviet Union and India to withdraw forces, as well as the diplomatic recess of UAR, Algeria and Syria with Washington, and also the closing of the Suez Canal for ships. The paper also

reported that Kosygin, the First deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, received Mohammed Ghaleb, the ambassador of UAR to Moscow in the Kremlin on that Tuesday.³¹

On 8 June, 1967, the *Népszava* reported that, concerning the Middle East conflict, the UNSC called for an immediate cease-fire, the fights continued on the Arab-Israeli fronts on Wednesday, the Soviet Union sent a message to the Israeli government and the Soviets delivered a proposal for a resolution to the UNSC.³² On 10 June, 1967, the paper reported on the Israeli attacks for which Syria requested an emergency special session of the UNSC, also reported on Nasser's resignation announcement.³³ On 11 June, the correspondent of *Népszava* noted that Nasser revoked his resignation and there were demonstrations in Moscow and Romania against the offensive imperialists. The headquarter of the World Federation of Democratic Youth in Budapest and the Hungarian Solidarity Committee also communicated their perspective on the armed conflict in which they demanded that the Israelis observe the rules of the cease-fire agreement and draw back their forces to the cease-fire demarcation line behind the demilitarised zone.³⁴ On 13 June, the Soviet Union demanded the end of Israeli aggression and the evacuation of the occupied territories. The same day, Hungary, Bulgaria and Poland cut off diplomatic relations with Israel.³⁵ On 20 June, *Népszava* reported on Kosygin's speech delivered at the emergency special session of UNSC about the Middle East conflict and establishing a long-term peace, together with Nasser's position as prime minister.³⁶ On 21 June, 1967, 14 heads of state and 38 ministers of foreign affairs held a discussion at the emergency UN General Assembly in support of the talks about the Arab-Israeli war. Nikolai Podgorny also visited Cairo for the meeting of the delegations of the socialist countries as a representative of the Soviet UN.³⁷ István Rudnyánszky, the correspondent of the MTI³⁸ in Cairo reported that Podgorny, head of the Soviet state, arrived in Cairo where he discussed the establishment of closer relations between the Soviet Union and Egypt, the equipment of the UAR army, the supplement of materiel lost during the Israeli attack and the termination of the aggression.³⁹ In the issue of 23 June, *Népszava* reported in detail on the Arab refugee question as a result of the conflict, on Tito's speech and offered reflections on de Gaulle's statement about the crisis.⁴⁰

On 14 July, 1967 *Népszabadság* reported news about the arrival of the Syrian president Atassi to Cairo on Thursday morning in the company of Prime Minister Zuayyin and their starting of negotiations with Nasser and Aref and Bumedien, the presidents of Iraq and Algeria, who were already in Cairo.

Mahgoub,⁴¹ the Prime Minister of Sudan, also joined them at the summit. The paper also analysed the settling of the Arab refugee question.⁴²

In the period between 21 and 31 October, 1967, *Népszabadság* regularly wrote about the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Israeli attacks and insults. Based on the news, the Israeli authorities' measures in the occupied territories implied a long-term presence. The imperialists and their Israeli agents hoped that after the military defeat, in a difficult internal situation, the reactionaries within Egypt and Syria would become active, and they would blame the progressives and turn the public's opinion against them. It also reported on the Arab League summit in Khartoum and the previous preparation conference of the ministers of foreign affairs. The Arab ministers of foreign affairs, after a long discussion, still couldn't agree on the oil boycott of the countries supporting Israel, and on the withdrawal of Arab funds from English, American and West German banks.⁴³

It is quite interesting for me that some politicians among the Israelis supported the Arab cause against their own country. *Népszabadság* interviewed two leaders of the Israeli Communist Party: Comrade Dr. Ethel Klinger, who was a member of the central committee and was part of the communist movement for 34 years, and Comrade Ali Ashur, the editor of the party's Arabic newspaper, *Al-Itihad*, and the member of the party committee in Haifa. They took questions relating to the crisis in the Middle East. They related, "Our Party believes that Israel should follow a policy that makes it possible to peacefully settle their relations with the Arab states. This is the only solution that may lead to the recognition of Israel by the Arab states. Our slogan is: 'We are not with the imperialists against the Arabs, but with the Arab people against the imperialists!'"⁴⁴

On 12 November, 1967, *Népszabadság* mentioned that Brezhnev would visit Cairo in the beginning of 1968 for discussing bilateral relations and the conflict. The Soviet assignee showed interest in supporting the UAR, "We will give you all the support needed to fight this war, now and in the future." The newspaper was also informed that the Soviets gave a proposal to the UNSC to raise the number of UN observers in the zone of the Suez Canal.⁴⁵ During his visit to Moscow, Ali Sabri, the Vice-President of Egypt, officially invited Brezhnev, on behalf of Nasser, who accepted the invitation. Considering the special interest of the Egyptian popular opinion about the importance of the Soviet solidarity, the Vice-President of Egypt, after his return, reported in the cabinet council about the meetings in Moscow.⁴⁶

Summarizing the side of the press, the Hungarian daily and weekly newspapers reported on the Arab-Israeli War, the combat and engagements, the negotiations, the sessions of the UN, the emergency special sessions of the UNSC, as well as on the meetings, conferences and statements of the Arab leaders on a day-to-day basis. Each newspaper published many news, primarily on the front page, which reflected interest and support for the Arab people. Hungarians, in most cases, regarded the Israeli attack as aggression, and called the international supporters of Israel imperialists.

Hungary, the supporter of the Arab people

Near the end of May, President Pál Losonczy⁴⁷ assured Nasser, in a message, of his full support for Egypt. On the second day of the outbreak of the war, the government gave an official statement in which they condemned the extremist circles controlling Israeli politics,⁴⁸ and of course, the imperialist powers behind them, primarily the United States of America, who "seized every opportunity for stabilizing their international independence and stabbing the Arab states in the back, who were fighting for social progress". He called upon the UN to take measures for stopping those military actions and ordering the troops to retreat to their position prior to the war.⁴⁹

In their statement, the Soviet government labelled the "senseless and political adventurer Israeli government"⁵⁰ as an aggressor. However, they quite positively evaluated Nasser's speech on 9 June and the withdrawal of his resignation. They considered him as a wise real-politician.

On 9 June in Moscow, the leaders of the socialist countries – with the exception of Romania and the presence of Yugoslavia – held a conference. They expressed their solidarity with the Arab states and decided upon their level of support. "We gave something like 8 million rubles emergency aid in food and medication. We offered 4 million rubles in military aid to Syria, in addition, the transportation of ca. 15-million-pounds industrial and agricultural equipment to Egypt on trust. We could contribute by so doing in the current situation." – as written in the record of the meeting of Leonid Brezhnev and János Kádár⁵¹ on 8 September, 1967.⁵² On 22 June, Hungary cut off the diplomatic relations with Israel. Other socialist countries did the same, except Romania, whose leader, Ceausescu made the Arab states responsible for the outbreak of the war and didn't condemn Israel. The fact that the Central Committee of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party convened a meeting to discuss the Middle East question reflects its importance. In the Central

Committee, they always discussed or listened to reports on the current international situation. However, putting a specific question on the agenda only happened in the case of the Vietnam War. In the decision adopted in the meeting on 23 June, they stated "The Central Committee condemns Israel's aggression, the plans to annex the territories of the neighbouring Arab states, the abuse of the Israeli military authorities and the expulsion of the unprotected Arab population from the occupied territories ...By expressing our nation's friendly feeling and will, the Central Committee assures the Arab people, who suffer the aggression, of our total solidarity."⁵³ The Hungarian party and government classified the war as a coordinated imperialist attack with the purpose to "disrupt the national liberation movements, rob the national freedom of the progressive autonomous people, prevent them from making decisions over their fate, and attempt to maintain or restore their colonial dependence in a new form." – as it read in the decision. The expression of solidarity signified the protection of the achievements and success in Egypt's national independence and social progress.

They intended to fight for the purpose within the UN's frame, at a political level and not with weapons. However, they knew that there was no good chance for a just settlement of the issue owing to the opposition of the USA. The UNSC's Nr. 242 decision of 22 November reflects their opinion: it called upon the Israeli armed forces to retreat from the occupied territories, recognised the right of all states of the region, including Israel, for sovereignty and integrity. However, the problem of Palestine, which became widely known around the world at that time, was *not handled as a national, but only a refugee question*, and a need for a just settlement was emphasised.

On the front page of its 25 June, 1967 issue, the *al-Ahrám* reported that the Hungarian People's Republic condemned the conspiracy, namely the Israeli aggression against the UAR, and demanded the withdrawal of the invading military forces, and also expressed full support to the UAR.⁵⁴

The *al-Messa* daily newspaper published on 17 July, 1967, that the Hungarian People's Republic provided 5 tons of medical aids for the UAR, and expressed solidarity and support concerning their currently difficult situation.⁵⁵

On 21 July, 1967, Elek Tóth, Hungarian ambassador and Head of IX Regional Department, invited the ambassador of Egypt to Budapest, Fouad, who accepted the invitation and came. The Hungarian diplomat in charge informed the ambassador of the UAR about the situation in the Hungarian government with respect to the future aid

to be provided to the UAR. In connection with the military part of the offered aid, the ambassador of the UAR highlighted that the Arabs were primarily more in the need of military experience, in particular, how to use the weapons, than of military equipment.⁵⁶

On 15, 16 and 17 August, 1967 *The Egyptian Gazette* published a report that a high-level Hungarian delegation would visit Egypt to discuss and develop the Egyptian-Hungarian relations, as well as to assess the needs of Egypt after the events of war.⁵⁷

Gyula Kállai, the former Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, told the Egyptian magazine, *Rose al-Yusuf*, in an interview that he believed "the Middle East crisis is part of the fights against colonisation. We and all the other socialist countries are one part of the fight. Those countries and people who are fighting against colonisation should bend every effort. Our past history is all about a history of struggle. [...] We can only confront our enemy with a true fight. [...] The Arabs and their fight enjoy the full support of our government and people. [...] We stand with you on all fronts against the aggression. This makes us and you a common front. It is quite clear from every aspect – official or popular. [...] It is also obvious what Israel committed with the aggression. After all, they threatened the whole world with a war."⁵⁸

Internal politics in Egypt after the War of 1967 from the point of view of Hungary

The ambassador of Hungary to Cairo⁵⁹ understood the new internal and international situation for the UAR after the Israeli aggression. As for the internal situation, the social-internal affairs were partly clarified, on the other hand, the inconsistencies prior to the War of 1967 were incredibly increased and the process of an inside social transition accelerated. Nasser made more and more strict arrangements to eliminate any deterrent forces. Nasser aimed at a radical reorganisation of the military leadership. An important act of this process was the arrest of Amer's group. As for the formation of the UAR-Hungarian relations, the aggression on the UAR caused temporary problems. High-level visits were suspended with Nasser, Sedky Suleiman,⁶⁰ Anwar el-Sadat,⁶¹ Mahmoud Riad⁶² competent ministers, and Zayed, the Governor of Cairo.⁶³ However, the Hungarian invitations were renewed on paper.⁶⁴

Nasser didn't have a firm, well worked-out political conception for *what to do next*. He hadn't given a statement since his resignation speech on 9

June, for which he was widely criticised, especially by the leftists. The reason behind his silence was that he didn't have anything to say. The government set up on 19 June was qualified as a government of national unity and the press also applied this label. "As I see it, this cannot be truly said since many political wings are not represented in this government. It is better to say that the government in Egypt is a Nasserist government of unity in which different wings of Nasser's supporters are represented. However, the leftists, the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Wafdists, the party of the old bourgeoisie, still had existing powers and it wouldn't be wise to completely undermine their influence, together with the West-supporter wing of free officers lead by Bogdadi⁶⁵ and Hussein,⁶⁶ the former president."⁶⁷

Ambassador Pál Rácz emphasised in his report of 28 July, 1967 that Egypt wouldn't initiate the renewal of armed conflicts in the near future, and that it wasn't impossible in diplomatic circles that Israel would take such action and try to prevent the Soviet re-arming of the Egyptian military.⁶⁸

The exposure of the Amer-officers' (chief officers as well) conspiracy proved how powerful forces stood against the Nasser-leadership and the prevailing system. Referring to the incidents, "Nasser's statement that the situation is improving inside the military and the number of discontents is decreasing is interesting [...] Based on my opinion and information from different sources, this conclusion can only be partially accepted since the incidents revealed that the situation within the military is not nearly as clear as the President declared. [...] As the time passed proved, Nasser has the best relation to Major General Fawzy among the leaders of the military; he gives him larger power and relies on his work. Nasser trusted him with breaking down the officers' party, which he successfully accomplished, then with questioning Marshal Amer, etc. [...] Zakaria Mohieddin,⁶⁹ Hussein el-Shafei, Anwar el-Sadat assured Nasser of their support, and asked him to be consistent in dealing with the officers' party. President Nasser and el-Sadat, as two of the members from the old officers' party, personally talked to Amer about his wrongdoing."⁷⁰ The Hungarian ambassador to Moscow further explored the question and wrote in his highly confidential report of 23 October, 1967 that "Personally, Amer's suicide clearly had an unpleasant impression on Nasser. Nevertheless, it seems that the former vice-president's action stabilised Nasser and his system, in this regard; with his death, the opposition that still exists in the military lost a leader who could have lead them in military personnel." As the ambassador of Hungary

to Moscow saw, "Nasser still doesn't feel his position is absolutely stable, in some sense, he doesn't have the total freedom to act."⁷¹

However, six months after the aggression, the opinion of the ambassador of Hungary to Cairo changed almost completely "...the system successfully survived the political and economic crisis, and currently none of the internal oppositional social players are in a position to directly threaten its existence. Fundamentally, the efforts and actions made for stabilization proved to be effective... "For achieving stability, they needed to 1) reorganize and renew the military including the guarantee of efficiency, eliminate the military bourgeoisie (Amer's and Salah Nasr's⁷² officer parties), consciously reduce the number of Soviet advisors and hinder their tasks 2) mobilise people including organising and leading people's resistance, civil protection trainings, securing the agitation on production, and organising general political lecture series."⁷³

The causes of defeat from the Hungarian perspective

Looking at the causes of defeat while forming their opinion, the Hungarian leaders relied on the analyses of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the reports of the ambassadors of the region, especially the very thorough and informative ones from Damascus. There were many reasons for the Arab states' defeat. Primarily, there were socio-political reasons as well as subsequent organisational and morale problems, and not the difference in the number of personnel or in the quality standards of weapons among the opponent armies.

Above all, there was no unity among the Arab states as to whether they really wanted the war. At the same time certain politicians', especially the ones from Syrians Ba'ath Party, already promoted unrealistic slogans stirring up sentiments of the masses, triggering the disapproval of the international public opinion, which multiplied the strength of Israel. The Syrian communists, who had representatives in the state government at a ministerial level, warned the government, in vain, about the negative line of their politics compromising the existence of Israel as a state "the Ba'athists – as Khaled Bagdash,⁷⁴ the general secretary of the communist party, told in his evaluation speech at the Hungarian embassy on 3 July – delivered the watchword to destroy Israel, and yet, they couldn't even protect themselves."⁷⁵

An analysis from the embassy of Damascus, dated 21 June, also warns about the harmful and subversive role of the Ba'ath Party's leaders "unreal, very often demagogic, exaggerated, leftist leading representatives conducting a policy that resulted in a

more tense situation and war in the Middle East."⁷⁶ He refers to the statement of the Minister of Defence (later President), Hafez al-Assad, on 20 May as an example in which he urged the "fateful battle".

The Arab states were not prepared for the war. Although they voiced their unity, they pulled apart (e.g. extremely stark opposition between Syria and Jordan). They were far behind Israel from military aspects. According to the Soviet military attaché, though, the military power of the Arab states was potentially larger than Israel's, "they lack organisation, professional leadership and adequate training."⁷⁷

Within the intransigent and leftist leadership – even affected by the Chinese ultra-revolutionary slogans –, the feeling of despair brought up taking terrifyingly careless steps. We can read the following in the already quoted analysis from 21 June, "The Arab states would have expected from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries to actively intervene in the war and assist in unleashing a third world war."⁷⁸ Moscow, of course, refused the request for military intervention, however, alerted certain units of the Warsaw Pact. On 12 June, the Algerian president, Bumedien travelled to Moscow after meeting with Nasser, and "he practically demanded a direct Soviet military intervention, though, he didn't consider that it could unleash a world war."⁷⁹

Hungarian public opinion had reason to think that, beside the solidarity towards the fighting in Vietnam, the newly emerging need to support the Arab states would impose more expenses on the people. Moreover, it would be unnecessary, because the Arabs kept losing while the Vietnamese bravely fought. For this reason – as a diplomat taking the floor at the ambassadors' meeting in August 1967 declared –, the view that "supporting the Arabs is a waste of money" became widely known.⁸⁰ The Egyptians themselves were also ashamed of the catastrophic defeat, which is proven by the fact that the ambassador of Egypt to Budapest apologised at the first meeting of consultation of foreign affairs for not able to show up at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: "he is very ashamed for the military defeat and the situation, anyway [...] he is leaving for Lake Balaton with his family for 10-11 days".⁸¹

And indeed, the Hungarian public opinion, including the members of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, was divided; they couldn't unambiguously – or at all – identify themselves with the politics of the government. János Kádár already discussed this topic at the meeting of the Central Committee, and imposed sanctions against those who oppose the party's official opinion. He also explained that "the Arab statements against Israel

were not completely correct, and we need to clearly express in our propaganda: the socialist countries never supported the Arab propaganda campaign that Israel has to be ruined." At the same time, he also declared without equivocation that "the present situation means failure and defeat for the Arabs, the anti-imperialist and the progressive Arab systems – and directly for us, too."⁸² In his confidential report, in which he presented the public sentiment concerning the Arab-Israeli conflict, he wrote the following "the Hungarian Jewish communists consider that justice is on Israel's side against the Arabs. ...the Arabs are anti-Semitic and anti-communists. Nasser is like Hitler. The Soviet Union lost great respect."⁸³

In acknowledging the situation, János Kádár decided that the members of the party should be informed about the real situation. The occasions for presenting such information were provided by the so-called "free party events", when the party organisation of each institution, factory, settlement, etc. held an extended general meeting (i.e. non-party members were also welcomed), where the news that were not to be published openly in the press could circulate (also many from the examples above).⁸⁴

However, the publication of some opposing popular opinions contrasting with the official line of politics in the press couldn't be avoided. These opinions found their way to be really expressed, certainly, in a specific form proper to the character of the system: one had to "read between the lines".

The official media of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, *Népszabadság*, published an article on 26 June with a title "Az ENSZ-közgyűlés, a Közel-Kelet és mi" ("The UN General Assembly, the Near East and Us"). The author of the article was anonymous; it was a so-called "inside editorial", that is to say, reflected the official point of view. It is worth including a few longer quotes. First, the article states that "different layers of the public opinion reacted in several ways to the complicated series of events, here, as well." They are not specifically pointed out, only presented in general. "Some thought: hard times will come again to a certain group of Jews who survived fascism, and they considered it historically unjust and emotionally painful." It is quite clear from the phrasing that this layer primarily refers to the Jews and their sympathisers. And what did Israel do and how did Israel act? They violated the border, unleashed a war and committed aggression. Then, "their leaders brashly stated after the successful aggression that they wouldn't return the stolen lands – well, do you think we should have supported this Israel? We couldn't even do so for our still active solidarity to all

the people of different nations, races and colour persecuted by fascism." As it is revealed, the article – not openly but implicitly – turns the fascist accusations against the Arabs against the aggressive Israel when it judgementally refers to the anti-fascist solidarity. However, to prevent harsh associations, it immediately declares that Israel has been recognised, and the people and the government of Israel do not equate.

Without quoting any sides, the article condemns all extreme statements from both parties as being the manifestation of "nationalism easily devolving into chauvinism".

Finally, how should the conflict be resolved? After convicting both extreme sides – those for war and those for peace at all costs – the answer is: the elimination of the consequences of aggression is ultimately guaranteed by the enforcement of the policy of peaceful coexistence.

A few days after the publication of the article, on 29 July, János Kádár visited the Ganz-MÁVAG factory and, as usual, gave a speech in which he revisited the problem and tried to explain that "no help is in vain, we are obliged to help".⁸⁵

Hungary, as all other socialist countries, strived to achieve a peaceful solution for the conflict and, in this, was the partner of President Nasser. The Hungarian opinion and point of view concerning the War of 1967 reflected the view of the socialist countries (except Romania).

conclusion

As a conclusion, the „blitzkrieg” on 5 June 1967, the Arab world was severely defeated, which also signified the failure of its allies: the Soviet Union and the socialist countries as well. The catastrophic defeat in such a short time surprised everyone including the participants themselves. Hungarian political leaders continued to offer their support to the Arab nations affected by the Israeli aggression, however, they also criticised certain Arab politicians for their extremist, and reckless statements. Nasser didn't intend to start a war, he was only ready to take defensive steps and exert pressure. There was no unity among the Arab states as to whether they really wanted the war, and they were not prepared for the war. From May 1967, newspapers in Hungary devoted much attention to the Middle East, and the Hungarian followed the news about the War of 1967 closely adding military and political analyses.

Notes:

This paper was supported by Tempus Public Foundation.

- 1 Hungary's most significant national political and public daily newspaper until October, 2016. The first issue in its first year was published on 2 November, 1956, as the successor of *Szabad Nép*.
- 2 Hungarian leftist political daily newspaper. Originally the medium of MSZDP, later of the labour unions from 1948 to 1989. It was privatised during the democratic transformation.
- 3 Al-Ahram, founded on 5 August 1875, is the most widely circulating Arabic daily newspaper. In addition to the main edition published in Egypt, the paper publishes two other Arabic-language editions, one geared to the Arab world and the other aimed at an international audience, as well as editions in English and French.
- 4 Rose al-Yusuf or Rose al-Yousef, is an Arabic weekly political magazine published in Egypt, and it was first published on 26 October 1925.
- 5 Al-Messa is an Arabic daily newspaper published in Egypt. It was founded in October 1956. It is issued from al-Tahrir Publishing House along with al-Gomhuria newspaper and some other publications.
- 6 An English-language Egyptian daily, part of al-Tahrir Publishing House. First published on 26 January 1880, it is the oldest English-language newspaper in the Middle East.
- 7 Yevgeny (Evgueni) Primakov born in 1929. He was the Middle East correspondent of the Soviet communist party newspaper, *Pravda*, for years. Scientist and academic, the leader of Russian surveillance, then the head of the foreign affairs department between 1996 and 1998, Prime Minister of Russia between 1998 and 1999. Died at the age of eighty-five in 2015 after suffering a long illness.
- 8 (1918–1970). One of the most well-known and most charismatic Arab politicians, 2nd president of Egypt. A prominent representative of the Arab nationalism in the 1950s and 1960s, and a chief organiser of the Non-Aligned Movement.
- 9 *Evgueni Primakov: Au coeur du pouvoir. Mémoires politiques. Éditions du Syrtes, Paris. 2001. 231.*
- 10 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, Arab országok 1966. 116. d. 202–14. tétel. A Magyar Népköztársaság és az arab országok kapcsolatainak alakulása.
- 11 (1931–2016), Syrian politician and active member of the ruling Ba'ath Party, prime minister between 1966 and 1968.
- 12 Book of Hejkal: 1967 al-Infijâr (Cairo, 1990. pp 364–366.) Quotes: *Laurens, Henry: Paix et guerre au Moyen-Orient. L'Orient et le monde de 1945 à nos jours. Aramand Colin, Paris. 1999. 2300–236.*
- 13 Abdel Hakim Amer (1919–1967) was Minister of Defense from 1956 to 1967. He also served as Vice-President from 1958 to 1965. In 1967 he was deposed for allegedly plotting against Nasser, and he chose the option of killing himself with poison.
- 14 Quotes: *Eric Rouleau: Dans les coulisses du Proche-Orient. Mémoires d'un journaliste diplomate (1952–2012). Fayard, Paris. 2012. 158–159.*
- 15 (1915–1981) Israeli military leader and politician, the Commander-in-Chief of the Israel Defence Forces between 1953 and 1958, later Minister of Defence between 1967 and 1974, Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1977 and 1979
- 16 Quotes: *Laurens, Henry: La question de Palestine. 3. k. 1947–1967. L'accomplissement des prophéties. Fayard, Paris 2007. 679.*
- 17 One of the first and most prominent Egyptian transnational Arabic-language radio services. It is the main medium through which president Nasser spread his messages on Arab unity and revolutions. It had unmatched popularity in most of the 1950s and 1960s, but now commands no large audience.
- 18 (1908–1980) the first Chairman of the Palestine Liberation Organization, serving 1964–67. Al-Shukeiri was a member of the Syrian delegation to the United Nations from 1949 to 1951. He then became Assistant Secretary General for the Arab League from 1950 to 1956.
- 19 (1886–1973.) Israeli politician, prime minister, labour union activist.
- 20 A Latin expression meaning "an act or event that provokes or is used to justify war".
- 21 Feljegyzés Nácsszer és Pozsidajev szovjet nagykövet megbeszéléséről, 1967. május 22. In: A közel-keleti konfliktus dokumentumai 1957–1967. Az Orosz Föderáció Külpolitikai Archívumának dokumentumaiból. (Editor-in-chief.: V.V. *Namjkin*) Moscow, 2003. 562. (in Russian)
- 22 A szovjet kormány nyilatkozata, 1967. május 24. *Népszabadság*, 1967. május 25.
- 23 *Tom Segev: Nous sommes toujours en 1967. Courrier international*, June 2007 (Issue Nr. 865.)
- 24 Ezer Weizman (1924–2005) President of Israel 1993–2000. Before the presidency Weizman was commander of the Israeli Air Force and Minister of Defense.
- 25 Quotes: *Benny Morris: Victimes. Histoire révisitée du conflit arabo-sioniste. Ed. Complexe, IHTP Paris. 2003. 319.*
- 26 (1924–2017) the First General Secretary of the Iraqi communist party between 1964 and 1993. Sentenced to jail for 15 years, released after 10 years in prison due to the revolution in 1958.
- 27 MNL OL M–KS 288.f. 32/1975. Feljegyzés Pullai Árpád és Aziz Mohamed megbeszéléséről. 44. őrzési egység (ő.e.)
- 28 *Abdallah Abdel-Ati Abdel-Salam Mohamed: Az Egyiptomi-magyar kapcsolatok a két világháború közötti időszakban. JatePress, Szeged. 2015. 107.*
- 29 Quotes President Atassi: *Népszabadság*, 1967. May 23.
- 30 *Népszava*, Legújabb jelentések a közel-keleti fegyveres konfliktusról. 1967. June 6/131, front page.

- 31 *Népszava*, a Magyar Népköztársaság nyilatkozatát a közel-keleti konfliktusról. 1967. June 7/132, front page.
- 32 *Népszava*, Szovjet kezdeményezésre, azonnali tűzszünetre hívott fel a BT. 1967. June 8/133, front page.
- 33 *Népszava*, A BT felhívása. 1967. June 10/135, front page.
- 34 *Népszava*, A közeli-keleti konfliktus hírei. 1967. June 11/136, 5.
- 35 *Népszava*, A BT sorozatos üléseken tárgyal a közel-keleti konfliktusról. 1967. June 13/137, front page.
- 36 *Népszava*, A Szovjet Unió megtesz azért, hogy hozzájáruljon a Közel-Kelet tartós békéjének biztosításához. 1967. June 20/143, front page.
- 37 *Népszava*, A rendkívüli ENSZ-közgyűlés keddi vitája. 1967. June 21/144, front page.
- 38 Magyar Távirati Iroda or Hungarian Telegraphic Office is the Hungarian news agency. One of the oldest news agencies in the world. It was founded in 1880.
- 39 *Népszava*, Podgornij megkezdte Kairói tárgyalásait. 1967. June 22/145, front page.
- 40 *Népszava*, A közel-keleti válság az ENSZ előtt. 1967. June 23/146, 5.
- 41 Mohamed Ahmed Mahgoub (1908–1976) famous Sudanese poet, writer, engineer, judge, lawyer, politician, minister of foreign affairs and head of government.
- 42 *Népszabadság*, Öt arab ország elnöke Kairóban. 1967. July 14/164, 5.
- 43 *Népszabadság*, 1967. October 21–31.
- 44 *Népszabadság*, Nem az imperialistákkal az arab népek ellen, hanem az arab népekkel az imperialisták ellen - Beszélgetés az Izraeli Kommunista Párt hazánkban járt képviselőivel. 1967. October 1/232, 2–3.
- 45 *Népszabadság*, Brezsnyev elvtárs jövő év elején az EAK-ba látogat. 1967. November 12/268, front page.
- 46 *Népszabadság*, Ali Szabri beszámolt moszkvai tanácskozásairól. 1967. Nov., 14/269, front page.
- 47 (1919–2005) was a Hungarian Communist political figure, and head of state from 1967 to 1987.
- 48 *Népszabadság*, 1967. May 23.
- 49 *Népszava*, a Magyar Népköztársaság nyilatkozata a közel-keleti konfliktusról. 1967. June 7/132, front page.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 (1912–1989) was a Hungarian communist leader and the General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers' Party, presiding over the country from 1956 until his retirement in 1988.
- 52 Jegyzőkönyv Leonyid Brezsnyev és Kádár János tárgyalásáról, Budapest, 1967. szeptember 8. In: Kádár János külpolitikája és nemzetközi tárgyalásai. 1956–1988. 2. k. Válogatott dokumentumok (Ed.: Földes György) Napvilág Kiadó, Budapest. 2015. 264. János Kádár also noted, concerning the requests, that the Arabs didn't know exactly what to ask for. The supplement of weapons was provided by the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia.
- 53 Az MSZMP Központi Bizottságának határozata a közel-keleti válság kérdésében. In Az MSZMP határozatai és dokumentumai 1967–1970. Kossuth Könyvkiadó, Budapest. 89–90.
- 54 *Al-Ahram*, The Hungarian People's Republic condemns the plot, 1967. June 25/-, front page.
- 55 *Al-Messa*, Five tons of medical aid by Hungary, 1967. July 17/-, front page.
- 56 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00644/14. Tóth Elek osztályvezető: Fouad, EAK nagykövét látogatása, Bp., 1967. July 22.
- 57 *The Egyptian Gazette*, Hungarian economic delegation to Cairo, 1967. August 15–17/-, 3.
- 58 *Rose al-Yusuf*, Az 1967-es vereség képe egy baráti ország szemszögéből. 1968. February 19/2071, 8–9.
- 59 Pál Rác (Bors, January 4, 1928 – Budapest, March 22, 1986) Diplomat, foreign office personnel, deputy minister, ambassador of the Hungarian People's Republic to Cairo between 1963–68, head of the UN delegation to New York between 1980 and 1986.
- 60 Sedky Suleiman (1919–1996) military engineer, minister supervising the Aswan High Dam and Prime Minister of Egypt in 1966.
- 61 (1918–1981), Egyptian army officer and politician who was president of Egypt from 1970 until his assassination in 1981. He shared the 1978 Nobel Prize for Peace with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin.
- 62 (1917–1992), Egyptian diplomat and free officer. Ambassador to Syria (1955–58), special adviser to President Nasser (1958–62), and permanent ambassador to the United Nations (1962–64). As Egyptian Foreign Minister (1964–72) and deputy premier (1971–72), and as secretary-general of the Arab League (1972–79).
- 63 Saad Zayed, Egyptian politician, military officer, Governor of Cairo and minister of public work in Egypt.
- 64 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 003794. IX. Területi Osztály (Dr. Simonyi Ernő – Pereszlényi Zoltán): Feljegyzés: Tárgy: Rác Pál kairói nagykövét beszámolója, Bp., 1967. szeptember 15.
- 65 Abdel-Latif Mahmoud al-Bogdadi, free officer, Minister for Rural Affairs and Planning, Nasser's close friend. Representative of the Egyptian party in the Egyptian-British discussion in July 1954.
- 66 Hussein Mahmoud Hassan el-Shafei, (1918–2005), was a free officer and a member of Egypt's 1952 revolutionary leadership council and served as Vice-president under two Egyptian presidents, Nasser and el-Sadat.
- 67 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00904/7. Rác Pál: A belső helyzet alakulása, Kairó, 1967. július 19.

- 68 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00904/8. Rác Pál: Az elmúlt hét bel-, és külpolitikai fejleményei, Kairó, 1967. július 28.
- 69 Zakaria Abdel-Megid Mohieddin (1918–2012) Egyptian politician, minister of interior, free officer, head surveillance, vice-president, president for two day (presidential resignation after the military defeat in 1967).
- 70 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00904/9. Bencekovics Lajos, ideiglenes ügyvivő, Tárgy: A tiszti csoport leleplezése, Kairó, 1967. szeptember 21.
- 71 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00904/11. Dr. Köver, moszkvai magyar nagykövet, Tárgy: Szovjet vélemény az EAK belső és nemzetközi helyzetéről, Moszkva, 1967. október 23.
- 72 (1920–1982) Egyptian military officer, and the head of the General Intelligence Service between 1957 and 1967.
- 73 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00904/14. Rác Pál: Összefoglaló az EAK belpolitikai helyzetének alakulásáról, Kairó, 1967. december 20.
- 74 Khaled Bakdash or Bagdash or Bekdache (1912–1995). The First General Secretary of the Syrian-Lebanese communist party from 1936 until his death. Elected member of the Arab parliament in 1954. Also known as the „dean of the Arab communism”. Founder of the *Sout Al-Shaab* "Voice of the People" daily paper in 1937.
- 75 MNL OL M-KS MSZMP Külügyi Osztály iratai, 288.f. 32/1967. Jelentés a szíriai és a libanoni kommunista párt vezetőivel folytatott beszélgetésről, Budapest, 1967. július 10. 4. őrzési egység (ő. e.)
- 76 Ibid. 9. ő. e.
- 77 Ibid. Katonai információk, 1967, szeptember 5.
- 78 MNL OL M-KS MSZMP Külügyi Osztály iratai 288. f. 32/1967. Az arab-izraeli háborúról, 9. ő.e.
- 79 MNL OL XIX-J-1-j, Arab országok 1968. 90. d. Megbeszélés a szovjet külügyminisztériumi delegációval a Maghreb relációról, Budapest, 1967. december 27. Nyilvántartási szám: 001253/1.
- 80 MNL OL M-KS MSZMP Külügyi Osztály iratai, 288. f. 32/1967. Követi konferencia, Budapest, 1967. augusztus 14–29. 22. ő.e.
- 81 MNL OL KÜM-TÜK-XIX-J-1-j 35.d. 1967 Egyiptom, nyilvántartási szám: 00644/14. Tóth Elek osztályvezető: Fouad, EAK nagykövet látogatása, Bp., 1967. július 22.
- 82 Quotes: *Kocsis András*: Magyar zsidó politika a háború végétől a kommunista rendszer bukásáig. *Múlt és Jövő*, 2003. 3. sz. 36.
- 83 Ibid 37.
- 84 The author also took part in a „free party event”.
- 85 *Népszabadság*, 1967. július 30.

ملخص الدراسة:

عانى العرب من هزيمة ثقيلة في حرب الستة أيام التي اندلعت في 5 يونيو 1967. هذه الهزيمة تعني هزيمة حلفاء مصر وسوريا والاتحاد السوفيتي والدول الاشتراكية أيضاً. وعلى الرغم من أن القيادة المجرية قد عبرت عن استمرار دعمها للشعوب العربية التي نال منها العدوان الإسرائيلي، إلا أنها انتقدت التصريحات العنصرية وغير المسؤولة التي كان يطلقها بعض الساسة العرب (خاصة السوريون وقادة منظمة التحرير الفلسطينية). كان الرأي العام المجرى حائراً حول مسألة هل يستحق العرب الدعم، على الرغم من الهزيمة الشديدة التي لحقت بهم بهذه السرعة. لقد حارب الفيتناميون بشكل بطولي مقارنة بالعرب. كاتبني هذا المقال اعتمدا على الوثائق الخاصة بوزارة الخارجية المجرية (التي من بينها تقارير سفاراتها بدمشق وموسكو والقاهرة) ومستندات حزب العمال الاشتراكي المجرى "MSZMP"، بالإضافة إلى الصحافة المجرية اليومية في تلك الفترة وتحديداً جريدة نيبابدشاج "Népszabadság"، نيبافا "Népszava"، والصحافة المصرية اليومية في تلك الفترة، وتحديداً جريدة الأهرام، روز اليوسف، المساء، والإيجيشيان جازيت.