

# **Three Visions of Conflict: The Six Day War and the French Press, 1967**

**Robert Isaacson**

**The George Washington University**

Abstract:

Examination of the journalistic coverage of the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War by the French mainstream media reveals the centrality of the war experience as a turning point in French public discourse on Israel. Shared assumptions about Israel's vulnerability were replaced by diverse and often contradictory discourses of religious triumphalism, territorial revisionism, and ideological anti-imperialism. This analysis shows that French President Charles de Gaulle's interpretation of the war was far from dominant, and indicates that French public discourse on Israel was fractured and diverse, responsive to different events, and far from the monolith that polling that would suggest.

In November 1967, five months after Israel's dramatic victory in the June 5 to June 10 Six Day War, French President Charles de Gaulle publically ended the "tacit alliance" that had existed between France and Israel since the early 1950s.<sup>1</sup> In a nationally broadcast speech, de Gaulle expressed his frustration with Israel by critiquing Jews broadly, calling them "an elite people, sure of themselves and domineering...charged [with] burning and conquering ambition," and blamed the war on Israeli territorial aspirations.<sup>2</sup> These statements were a far cry from those de Gaulle had made only a decade prior, when he told then-Herut Party chairman, Menachem Begin, "Don't let go of Gaza. It is a sector essential for your security."<sup>3</sup> The November remarks drew fire from critics in France and Israel who saw the words as antisemitic and cementing his "betrayal" of Israel on the eve of the Six Day War by adopting a policy of "active neutrality."<sup>4</sup> This policy, itself a gesture meant to boost relations with the Arab world, threatened condemnation on whichever party initiated hostilities, and preemptively moved to cut off arms shipments to Israel. However, despite the criticism he received, de Gaulle was committed to a rapprochement with the Arab world that required a disengagement from Israel.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Tacit alliance" is the term Sylvia Crosbie uses to characterize French-Israeli relations in the 1950s and 1960s. See Sylvia Crosbie, *A Tacit Alliance; France and Israel from Suez to the Six Day War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974). For an overview of the Six Day War, see William Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, ed., *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Tom Segev, *1967; Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> For the full text of de Gaulle's speech, see *Le Figaro*, "La Crise Au Moyen-Orient," Nov. 28, 1967, p. 6. For an overview of the Six Day War, see William Roger Louis and Avi Shlaim, ed., *The 1967 Arab-Israeli War: Origins and Consequences*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), and Tom Segev, *1967; Israel, the War, and the Year that Transformed the Middle East*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Crosbie, 90. Cited by Eric Rouleau, "Au Moyen-Orient, diversification des amities dans la sauvegarde des interets nationaux," *Le Monde Diplomatique*, Jan. 1968, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> The use here of "antisemitism" instead of "anti-Semitism" stresses the former term's specific anti-Jewish character and attempts to distance the study of anti-Jewish prejudice from the racial connotations of the term "anti-Semitism." The sharpest indictment of De Gaulle's November remarks came from Raymond Aron. His critique may be found in Raymond Aron, "De Gaulle, Israel, et les Juifs," *Essais sur la condition Juive Contemporaine*, (Paris: Tallandier, 2007. Originally published in 1989). For an analysis of de Gaulle's November speech and its impact, see Henry Weinberg, *The Myth of the Jew in France, 1967-1982* (Oakville, Mosaic Press, 1987), 27-28, 39, 46, 60-61, 79, 105, 145. Weinberg sees de Gaulle's remarks as both ushering in and sanctioning a new wave of French antisemitic discourse.

<sup>5</sup> For de Gaulle's changing attitudes towards Israel, see especially Gadi Heimann, "From 'Irresponsible' to 'Immoral': The Shifts in de Gaulle's Perception of Israel and the Jews," *Journal of Contemporary History* 43, (2011): 897-919,

Yet, while de Gaulle has been a central focus in the scholarship on French-Israeli relations in the 1950s and 1960s, little scholarly attention has been devoted to French public discourse on the Six Day War. Indeed, public opinion surrounding the war seems to have sharply diverged from that of the President. A French survey taken on June 6, 1967, found that 56 percent of those polled declared themselves pro-Israel. A survey from July 17 found the views of 88 percent of the French population favorable towards Israel, yet by October, that number was back down to 68 percent.<sup>6</sup> How should we account for these fluctuating attitudes, and to what degree was public commentary on the Six Day War unified in content, as well as disposition? Was there an appreciable change in public discourse over the course of the war itself, and if so, why?

Examining the journalistic coverage of *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *L'Humanité* during the weeks immediately surrounding the war helps to illuminate these questions by highlighting the diverse interpretations of the war circulating in the French public sphere.<sup>7</sup> Representing the range

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who highlights de Gaulle's perception of Israel's reprisal policies as being increasingly irrational. See also Daniel Amson, *De Gaulle et Israel*, (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1991), Raymond Aron, *De Gaulle, Israel, and the Jews*. Trans. John Sturrock, (New York: Praeger: 1960), and Weinberg. On French-Israeli diplomatic relations in the 1950s and 1960s, see Crosbie, 46-50, 123-146, Michael Bar-Zohar, *Bridge over the Mediterranean: French-Israeli Relations, 1947-1963*, (Tel Aviv: Am Hasefer, 1965) (Hebrew), Gadi Heimann, "From Friendship to Patronage: France-Israel Relations, 1958-1967," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 21, (2010): 240-258, Zach Levey, *Israel and the Western Powers; 1952-1960*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), David Pryce-Jones, *Betrayal: France, the Arabs, and the Jews*, (New York: Encounter Books, 2006), Howard Sachar, *Israel and Europe: an Appraisal in History*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1998), and Guy Ziv, "Shimon Peres and the French-Israeli Alliance, 1954-9," in *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 45, no. 2 (April 2010); 406-429. Crosbie, Aron, and Weinberg have tended to privilege pragmatic considerations arising from the 1854-1962 Algerian War and Gamal Abdel Nasser's support of the Algerian revolt as the dominant factors accounting for France's political "honeymoon" with Israel in the 1950s and early 1960s. Sachar, Levey, and Ziv have recently complicated the presumed primacy of *realpolitik* in French policy to highlight the role of sentiment and ideology in the decision-making process.

<sup>6</sup> Crosbie, 90; Heimann, "Irresponsible," 910-913. On the impact of the Six Day War on Jewish communities internationally, see Eli Lederhendler, ed., *The Six Day War and World Jewry*, (Bethesda, Univeristy Press of Maryland, 2000).

<sup>7</sup> Joan Wolf has produced a similar examination of the French press, and focuses on the shared idiom of the Holocaust in French public discourse as a means of interpreting the Six Day War. Wolf suggests that this discourse served to open public discussion on the Holocaust, and suggests that the near-unanimous French Jewish identification with Israel at this time stemmed from their experience of the Holocaust "as trauma." The plurality of opinion among non-Jewish French people, she argues by contrast, was rooted in the absence of this trauma. Joan B.

of mainstream French journalistic discourse, *L'Humanité* being the news organ of the French Communist Party, *Le Figaro* articulating conservative interests, and *Le Monde* speaking from the center, these periodicals powerfully shaped the emerging narrative of the Six Day War in France.<sup>8</sup>

While often at odds, these papers nonetheless shared an initial sense that Israel's survival was in jeopardy, albeit articulated in starkly different ways, ranging from *Le Figaro's* fiery critiques of Nasser's "genocidal" ambitions, to *L'Humanite's* subdued refrain that it did not dispute Israel's "right to exist."<sup>9</sup> This common interpretation broke down over the course of the war, however, as Israel's victory raised new possibilities and new assessments of Israel's intentions. While *Le Figaro* vicariously shared in Israel's triumph, *L'Humanité* now presented Israel as an aggressively expansionist power, rather than the mere imperialist pawn it had seemed before. *Le Monde*, meanwhile, became increasingly critical of Israel, lobbying in the war's aftermath for the creation of a new bi-national Palestinian state that it expected to usher in a comprehensive regional settlement. Even as their commentary diverged, however, these periodicals shared a common tendency to situate the war outside its immediate regional context, whether as a battleground of the Cold War conflict or as a defiant afterword to the Holocaust. These shifting interpretations indicate that French public discourse on Israel was already changing significantly by the end of the Six Day War, but for diverse and often contradictory reasons, different from those articulated by the president, and reflecting the diverse politics and shared assumptions of the French press. This conclusion colors the gap between French policy

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Wolf, "'Anne Frank is Dead, Long Live Anne Frank': The Six-Day war and the Holocaust in French Public Discourse." *History and Memory* 11, no. 1 (June, 1999): 104-140.

<sup>8</sup> In fact, De Gaulle had himself ordered the creation of *Le Monde* in 1944, to replace the leading *Le Temps*, whose reputation had been tarnished by the experience of the German occupation. See Clyde Thogmartin, *The National Daily Press of France*, (Birmingham, Summa Publications, Inc., 1998), 129-131, 142-143.

<sup>9</sup> Yves Cuau, "Pour Israel le conflit arme peut eclater d'une minue a l'autre," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 1, 1967, p. 5; Yves Moreau, "Le Choix," *L'Humanite*, Jun. 2, 1967, p. 1.

and public opinion, and highlights the Six Day War as a catalytic moment in French discourse about Israel.

Prior to the outbreak of hostilities on June 5, each of the three mainstream periodicals articulated the belief that Israel was in jeopardy, although to different degrees, and for different reasons. The center-right *Le Figaro* voiced its concern most acutely, depicting Israelis as vulnerable Holocaust survivors whose national rebirth was threatened with destruction. Front-page articles from the first week of June spoke of Israeli "encirclement...by a vice of forces which have sworn to destroy" it, while popular support for Israel and criticism of de Gaulle's active neutrality consistently captured headlines.<sup>10</sup> For some reporters, the situation recalled the Holocaust directly. The paper's Tel Aviv correspondent expressed astonishment that "the appeal to murder and the 'physical liquidation' of the Jewish people is amplifying day after day across the whole Near East," and claimed that, "[with] a new 'final solution' to the Jewish problem in Palestine [looming]...Israel is directly threatened more than ever."<sup>11</sup> Other headlines also made reference to the impending threat of "genocide" facing the Israelis. For the reporters and editors of *Le Figaro*, Israel was facing no simple diplomatic scuffle, but a clear threat to its existence.

For the editors of *Le Monde*, however, diplomatic considerations were central. Significant coverage was devoted to the developing situation at the UN, where opposing American and Egyptian resolutions were being discussed, and to de Gaulle's newly-formulated policy of "active neutrality," which sought a French mediating role and threatened opprobrium on whichever party

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<sup>10</sup> Roger Massip, "L'Encerclement," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 1, 1967, p.1; Gerard Marin, "Nasser brandit deux nouvelles menaces," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 3-4, 1967, p. 7; Yves Cuau, "Pour Israel le conflit arme peut eclater d'une minue a l'autre," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 1, 1967, p. 5; *Le Figaro*, "Brandissant des pancartes 'A Bas le Nazisme Arabe,' 20.000 manifestants ont crie et chante devant l'embassade d'Israel a Paris..." Jun. 1, 1967, p. 5; *Le Figaro*, "La Federation de la gauche fonde un 'Comite pour le droit d'Israel a l'existence,'" Jun. 3-4, 1967, p. 6; Yves Cuau, "Une Patrouille israelienne accrochee par un commando venu de Syrie," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 3-4, 1967, p. 7; Yves Cuau, "Tres grande amertume devant la 'neutralite' de la France," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 5, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>11</sup> Yves Cuau, "Pour Israel le conflit arme peut eclater d'une minue a l'autre," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 1, 1967, p. 5.

initiated hostilities. Additionally, *Le Monde* strove to appear even-handed, consistently providing equal space to pro-Israel and pro-Arab commentary, often by juxtaposing it on the same page.<sup>12</sup>

However, *Le Monde* provided little analytical or editorial content on the developing crisis, and much of the paper's attitude has to be surmised based on the coverage and space it devoted to supporters of the would-be combatants.<sup>13</sup> Despite editorial efforts to appear neutral, the sheer quantity of pro-Israel statements and demonstrations reported by *Le Monde* gives it the appearance of a pro-Israel slant, and it is this content that most closely mirrors *Le Figaro*. Statements of solidarity with Israel, from Jewish and non-Jewish groups alike, often made direct connections between the Holocaust and the threat now facing Israel, as did an opinion piece that claimed that, with the political 'ghettoization' of Israel by its neighbors, "Auschwitz" was reproduced.<sup>14</sup> Significant space was also devoted to write-in criticism of de Gaulle's active neutrality; "France cannot rest mute," protested one critic, "before an action that puts into question the existence of the State of Israel."<sup>15</sup> Statements sympathizing with the United Arab Republic, a defense of the Gaullist position, and an editorial discussing "the error of Zionism" were simply drowned out.<sup>16</sup>

Between the two papers, then, a common picture of overwhelming popular support and concern for Israel emerged. For *Le Figaro*, the situation was that of Holocaust victims under threat of a new genocide. Public commentary published in *Le Monde* voiced similar concerns,

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<sup>12</sup> *Le Monde*, June 2, 1967, p. 4; Edouard Saab, "Union Nationale ou cabinet de guerre?" *Le Monde*, Jun. 3, 1967, p. 1. One factor contributing to *Le Monde's* quantitatively even coverage may be the depth of its journalistic roster; more so than either *Le Figaro* or *L'Humanité*, *Le Monde* was able to support multiple special correspondents throughout the conflict zone. Edouard Saab and *Le Monde* also stand out in the consistent attention they provided to Palestinian voices even before the outbreak of hostilities.

<sup>13</sup> Wolf, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Nollier, "La Garantie," *Le Monde*, Jun. 3, 1967, p. 3; *Le Monde*, "Les Etudiants du P.S.U. regrettent 'Le Caractere Raciste pris par Certaines Manifestations,'" Jun. 2, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *Le Monde*, "M. Albin Chalandon: la France ne peut pas rester muette devant une action qui mettrait en cause l'existence de l'Etat d'Israel," Jun. 4-5, 1967, p. 2; *Le Monde*, "M. Gaston Defferre: il faudra combattre la position du gouvernement francais," Jun. 4-5, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Le Monde*, "M. Giscard D'Estaing approuve Le General de Gaulle," Jun. 4-5, 1967, p. 2; M.A. Ammoumi, "Les Arabes, les juifs, la Palestine," *Le Monde*, Jun 4-5, 1967, p. 4.

though the paper's reporting was more concerned that tensions in the Middle East might ignite a wider conflict on the scale of Vietnam.

By contrast, *L'Humanité* echoed the French Communist Party's strict interpretation of the looming Middle Eastern conflict as a microcosm of an international anti-imperialist struggle. A narrative of American imperialist aggression against sovereign and democratic Arab states predominated the paper's pre-war coverage, to the apparent minimization of Israel's role in the brewing crisis. Front-page articles accordingly blamed American unwillingness to compromise for the increase in tensions, and claimed that America's "global [anti-communist] strategy" endangered both "the right of the Arab peoples to independence [and] the right of the State of Israel to exist."<sup>17</sup> At times, the paper carried its focus on American imperialism to surprising lengths: one telling article provided commentary on the diplomatic positions emerging from Cairo, Moscow, Paris, and Washington, while only indirectly referring to Israel itself.<sup>18</sup> The narrative that *L'Humanité* presented was accordingly one in which Israel figured as a pawn of American imperialism, rather than an independent actor.

*L'Humanité* published numerous statements from the Arab and Soviet blocs that reinforced these themes. Leading questions in an interview with Syrian Foreign Affairs Minister Ibrahim Makhos helped blame the crisis on American and British oil imperialism, while the Minister himself went on to characterize Zionism as a racist organ of imperial oppression.<sup>19</sup> Meanwhile, analytical sections deflected accusations of Arab antisemitism, and consistently centered Western imperialism instead: "There doesn't exist an 'antisemitism' amongst the Arabs..." wrote *L'Humanité's* Pierre Durand; "in reality, the Arabs aren't against the Jews," but

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<sup>17</sup> Yves Moreau, "Le Choix," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 2, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>18</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Moyen-Orient: Nouvelle Journée D'Expectative," Jun. 3, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Jacques Coubard, "Pour que la paix revienne au Moyen-Orient, l'ONU doit faire respecter toutes les décisions qu'elle a prises," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 2, p. 2.

rather "the European - or the American - [which] is a figure of oppression and exploitation, [for the] anti-colonialist."<sup>20</sup> Accusations of antisemitism were seen as a ploy meant to dodge the real issue of Western imperialism.

Indeed, for *L'Humanité's* editors, the entire Middle-East crisis was a distraction from the "real crimes" taking place in Vietnam.<sup>21</sup> A June 3 article dismissed the notion that Israel was under threat of "genocide," and noted that, "On the other hand, the United States has for many years been allowing a genocide against the Vietnamese people. When will [pro-Israel journalists] use their pens to protest against this REAL crime?"<sup>22</sup> Coverage on Vietnam continued to receive approximately as much space as the Middle East throughout the June crisis, an observation that is significant given the brevity of *L'Humanité's* daily editions.

Still, *L'Humanité's* editors felt some anxiety for Israel's future. A wish to guarantee the "right to exist" of *all* regional states was a frequent refrain, and the paper steered clear of or downplayed the most bellicose Arab war propaganda. In one revealing case, a journalist expressed sympathy for PLO leader Ahmed Choukeiri's prediction that no Jews would survive the looming war, but then backtracked to state that "in no case [did the Palestinian] tragedy justify [Choukeiri's] proposal..."<sup>23</sup> Yet if the editors downplayed Arab propaganda, their journalistic erasure of pro-Israel demonstrations in France was even more thorough. These, by contrast, were rarely reported at all, and their absence is striking when compared to the significant coverage provided by *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*. When *L'Humanité* did provide coverage of public opinion, it instead emphasized calls for negotiation, especially those from leftist Jewish groups, such as the Union des Societes Juives de France, and gave the impression

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<sup>20</sup> Pierre Durand, "Arabs, Europeens et antisemitisme," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 5, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>21</sup> Max Leon, "Il faut explorer toutes les voies d'une solution pacifique," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 2, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>22</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Deux attitudes," Jun. 3, 1967, p. 3

<sup>23</sup> *L'Humanité*, "A propos d'une declaration de M. Choukeiri," Jun. 2, 1967, p. 3.

of international and domestic consensus for a peaceful settlement.<sup>24</sup> Indeed, if the editors of *L'Humanité* perceived any threat to Israel at all, they saw it as emanating from the United States.<sup>25</sup> By consistently depicting American imperialism as the root of the impending crisis, *L'Humanité* blurred the distinctiveness of the situation and fit it neatly into the framework of an existing internationalist interpretation of global affairs, with aggressors and victims defined by the political ideologies ascribed to them.

The outbreak of hostilities saw these papers' shared sense of Israeli endangerment break down, though all three continued to contextualize the events broadly. *L'Humanité's* commentary changed most over the course of the war as its editors reconceived their narrative of Israel's past and present to figure it as an aggressively expansionist state in its own right. Well before unofficial Israeli statements hinted at the possibility of annexations, front-page articles critiqued Israeli "expansionist policy" and "annexationist aims" as the "origin of the aggression," comparing them with those of Hitler in his search for "vital space."<sup>26</sup> Israel's 1947-1948 War of Independence was also recast as expansionist, the first of many subsequent "faits accomplis" made in defiance of a Soviet-led international peace lobby.<sup>27</sup> Now, Israel was ranked with South Vietnam as a partner in American imperialism.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, *L'Humanité* took pains to stress the

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<sup>24</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Meeting des democrates juifs," Jun. 1, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>25</sup> Pierre Durand, "Des arguments de bon sens," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 2, 1967, p. 3. This article was reprinted from *Temoignage Chretien*.

<sup>26</sup> Rene Andrieu, "Persistance des perils," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 1; Pierre Durand, "Plus de mystere dans l'origine de l'aggression," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 2; Rene Andrieu, "Persistance des perils," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 1; Pierre Durand, "Plus de mystere dans l'origine de l'aggression," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 2; Pierre Durand, "Des Visees Annexionnistes," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> *L'Humanité*, "A qui appartient le golfe d'Akaba?" Jun. 7, 1967, p. 2; Jacques Couland, "Comment est ne L'Etat D'Israel," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Buchanan, "Thomas Buchanan: autor de 'Qui a tue kennedy' avec la gauche israelienne et les progressistes arabes contre l'imperialisme," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 4.

sympathy for Israel's situation expressed by South Vietnam's General Ky—by reporting it twice on the same day.<sup>29</sup>

The paper also devoted front-page coverage to the apparent irony that "yesterday's supporters of Munich," "professional antisemites," and former Organisation de l'armée secrète (OAS) leaders had become supporters of Israel, implicitly delegitimizing support for Israel by association with these characters of ill repute.<sup>30</sup> Similarly, instead of reporting the major pro-Israel public demonstrations taking place across France, the paper continued to publish calls for peace, particularly from leftist Jewish groups, in an effort to present Israel as acting in defiance of French and international opinion.<sup>31</sup> The striking change in *L'Humanité's* tone speaks to the shock with which its editors internalized news of Israel's victory, as well as their tendency to situate the conflict within the context of international anti-imperialism.<sup>32</sup>

*Le Monde*, by contrast, continued to present the conflict as a microcosm of Soviet-American diplomatic confrontation, with more partisan interpretations appearing in the paper's opinion pieces and coverage of public opinion.<sup>33</sup> Here, *Le Monde* created an image of overwhelming public support for Israel. A barrage of published statements insisted that French neutrality and "silence when Nasser seeks to complete the work of Hitler" was impossible, while others critiqued the Soviet Union's support for Arab states.<sup>34</sup> In a rare instance, one of the paper's journalists even partook in the religious excitement that followed Israel's capture of the Western Wall in Jerusalem, noting that "This return to Zion, two thousand years after the destruction of

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<sup>29</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Un Agent American," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 4; Yves Moureau, "A Qui la Faute?" *L'Humanité*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 1; *L'Humanité*, "Le general Ky: 'Je suis pour Israel,'" Jun. 9, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>30</sup> Rene Andrieu, "Sang et petrole," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 7, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>31</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Une declaration du mouvement de la Paix," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>32</sup> Directives from the PCF to toe the Soviet line likely also influenced the paper's editorial decisions, and *L'Humanité* continued to serve as a mouthpiece for Soviet interpretations of and statements concerning the war.

<sup>33</sup> Indeed, some articles compared the situation to the Cuban missile crisis. *Le Monde*, "Le Mauvais Cheval," Jun. 10, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>34</sup> *Le Monde*, "Les premieres reactions francaises," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 3.

the High Temple...crowns a military campaign led under superhuman conditions, [and] is for many an extraordinary act comparable to the flight of the Hebrews from Egypt."<sup>35</sup>

Yet counter-voices were also present. Some pieces expressed hope that the war would resolve the Palestinian refugee issue, while a front-page article regretted that racism in France had shifted from antisemitism to an "anti-Arab antisemitism."<sup>36</sup> A letter published by the paper on June 8 was more radical in its language: "The confusion between the imperialist and colonialist bridgehead which Israel represents...[and] the martyrdom inflicted by Hitler on millions of Jews in Europe does not justify the Zionists [becoming] the exterminating angels of the Arabs..."<sup>37</sup> This piece, and its charged language of extermination, was a precursor to *Le Monde's* postwar reporting, which would become increasingly critical of Israel over its perceived treatment of defeated Arab soldiers and civilians. The piece furthermore reveals how the paper's efforts to provide equal space to partisan contributors opened the door for more consistent criticism of Israel.

*Le Figaro* demonstrated the most continuity as hostilities broke out, and continued to provide a narrative of Israeli endangerment rooted in discourse on the Holocaust, even as Israeli victories hit headlines. One front-page article insisted that while Egypt "battles to conquer territory... [Israel] fights against a threat of destruction. For the one, it is a political affair, for the other, a question of life or death."<sup>38</sup> Others claimed Israel had avoided "a new Munich," arguing that "Israel has no territorial ambition to put forward. It has waged its battle not for self-

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<sup>35</sup> Ph. D, "Orgueil militaire et sentiment religieux dominant les reactions des Israéliens," *Le Monde*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> Andrew Pontaine, "Vingt Ans de Discorde," *Le Monde*, Jun. 7, 1967, p. 1 and 3; Robert Escarpit, "Au Jour le Jour; Antisemitismes," *Le Monde*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>37</sup> Wolf has highlighted this piece as an example of the early reversal of Holocaust discourse to reframe Israelis as exterminators and Arabs as victims. Vincent Monteil, "Correspondance: M. Vincent Monteil repond a M. Daniel Mayer," *Le Monde*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>38</sup> Andrew Frossard, "Responsables," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 1.

aggrandizement but for survival," while full-page coverage of French pro-Israel demonstrations gave the impression of unanimous support for the Jewish state.<sup>39</sup>

New triumphalist and religious discourses also began to emerge in the wake of Israeli victories. *Le Figaro's* journalists now wrote of the seemingly "supernatural" "victory of the army of David" and the return of "the people of Abraham" to "the Wall of Joy," enthusing over Israel's capture of Jerusalem. Jordanian forces, meanwhile, were castigated for endangering the city's holy sites with mortar fire.<sup>40</sup> Other articles linked Israeli victories with the legacy of the Holocaust, comparing Israel's war casualties with the "martyrs" of the concentration camps.<sup>41</sup> *Le Figaro's* wartime discourse evidences the continued centrality of the Holocaust to the editors' understanding, while the paper's new triumphalist idiom speaks to their readiness to share in the religious enthusiasm that followed Israel's victories.

As Israel signed its June 10 ceasefire with Egypt and focus shifted to the sporadic fighting continuing on the Syrian border, *Le Monde*, *L'Humanité*, and *Le Figaro* underwent further discursive shifts as they adapted to the new realities emerging from the brief war. For *Le Figaro*, triumphalist and religious discourses remained dominant. The paper labeled Israeli Defense Minister Moshe Dayan the "Cincinnatus of the Sinai," and expressed vicarious pride at the performance of French warplanes sold to Israel over the previous decade.<sup>42</sup> Other pieces

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<sup>39</sup> *Le Figaro*, "Des Israéliens chrétiens s'adressent aux chrétiens de France," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 4; Roger Massip, "Le vrai problème est celui de la négociation," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 3; *Le Figaro*, "Violents combats au sol et dans les airs," Jun. 6, 1967, p. 4; *Le Figaro*, "M. Abba Eban, ministre israélien des Affaires étrangères: 'Jamais un pays n'a fait usage de ses armes dans un but plus légitime,'" Jun. 6, 1967, p. 4; Raymond Aron, "Comment la Guerre est Devenue Inévitable," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 7, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>40</sup> Yves Cuau, "Sur les pas de l'armée victorieuse; J'ai assisté à la reddition des villages arabes," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 5; R. Bauduc, "Le peuple d'Abraham a remis pied dans l'enceinte sacrée du Temple de Salomon," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 8, 1967, p. 5; Yves Cuau, "Les Mortiers jordaniens à l'abri du Saint-Sépulcre," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 6, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> Yves Cuau, "En soixante minutes, les pilotes israéliens ont remporté une victoire décisive sur l'aviation adverse," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 7, 1967, p. 4.

<sup>42</sup> Lucius Quinctius Cincinnatus, fifth-century BCE Roman general, consul, and dictator, was revered as a model of mercy and civic virtue. Thierry Maulnier, "Et Maintenant?" *Le Figaro*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 1 and 3; *Le Figaro*, "Moshe Dayan; Cincinnatus du Sinai," Jun. 13, 1967, p. 7; Pierre Voisin, "L'exiguïté de l'État juif explique l'omniprésence

blasted "genocidal" Arab war aims, and blamed Arab states for refusing to absorb Palestinian refugees, whose condition the paper lamented.<sup>43</sup> The paper's religious idiom also became increasingly prevalent. Israel's "soldiers of David" were likened to "modern Maccabees," while articles referred to Israelis as "the people of God" or "Moses," and drew parallels to the biblical sojourn in the Sinai, and ancient battles at Jericho and Masada.<sup>44</sup>

However, *Le Figaro* also began to express new concerns that stemmed from Israel's conquest of Jerusalem's holy sites. One front-page piece compared the bulldozing of houses blocking the Western Wall unfavorably to Haussmann's renovations of Paris, noting that one could not separate the recapture of the monument from "its human context," and that this "was not a good means of rejoining with history."<sup>45</sup> Other articles suggested the internationalization of Jerusalem, and voiced worry that the Israeli conquest created "new problems" concerning the oversight of the holy places, which threatened Israeli relations with the Vatican.<sup>46</sup> For these journalists, Israel's victory had become an opportunity to redraw the political and religious realities of the Middle East, beyond merely establishing peace between Israel and its neighbors.

It was the journalists of *Le Monde*, however, who were most enthusiastic about the possibility of political revisionism, and most uncomfortable leaving a united Jerusalem in Israeli hands. This was a surprising turn for *Le Monde*, which now provided significant space to those who voiced anxiety about Jewish administration of the holy sites and called for an

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de ses forces aeriennes," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 7; Yves Cuau, "Tsahal: Armee du secret," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 15, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>43</sup> Yves Cuau, "Pendant ce temps la, un kibboutz..." *Le Figaro*, Jun. 16, 1967, p. 5; Yves Cuau, "Les trois heures du destin," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 13, 1967, p. 5; Jean-Francois Chauvel, "L'exode des Palestiniens a travers la Jordanie: un raz de maree qui risque de tout emporter," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 13, 1967, p. 7.

<sup>44</sup> *Le Figaro*, "Les forces Israeliensont penetre profondement en territoire syrien," Jun. 10-11, 1967, p. 7; Pierre Macaigne, "Lutte contre la montre a Jerusalem...ou les epidemies menacent," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 13, 1967, p. 4; Yves Cuau, "Il y aura d'interminables negociations mais cette fois les 'monstres foids' de la grande politique auront du mal a imposer le moindre 'diktat' a l'etat juif," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 5.

<sup>45</sup> Andre Frossard, "Cavalier Seul: Le Mur," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 14, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> R. Bauduc, "La liberation de Jerusalem pose maintenant des problemes diplomatiques," *Le Figaro*, Jun. 9, 1967, p. 5.

internationalization of the city. Indeed, a half-page article claimed that the "entire problem [of religious conflict in the Levant] resides in an *exclusivism* which Israel does not seem to be able to renounce," and Jewish "monopolization of the patrimony of Abraham."<sup>47</sup> These themes are particularly striking given their utter absence in the paper's earlier reporting, and the extensive space they received suggests sympathy on the part of the editors. The paper also saw the war as an opportunity to create a federal Palestinian state incorporating Israel and Jordan, and its promotion of this plan predominated in its diplomatic commentary.

*Le Monde* became increasingly critical of Israel as hostilities ended, and the paper's balance of commentary shifted accordingly. Central to this shift were the editors' perceptions of Israeli treatment of Egyptian prisoners in the Sinai, planned annexations, ceasefire violations, and sympathy for Arab war refugees.<sup>48</sup> Articles now referred to the closure of the Gulf of Aqaba as a "pretext" for Israel to launch its preemptive attack, while international condemnation of Israel received extensive coverage. Others warned that Israel's "expansionist" aims were "dangerous," and called on it to exchange "Anglo-American protection for an international guarantee."<sup>49</sup>

*Le Monde* also began to distance itself from the discourses of Israeli endangerment and the Holocaust as it became clear that Israel had been the war's victor. Some sections explained that French popular support for Israel was based on well-meaning but misplaced sympathy for the Holocaust which, *Le Monde* argued, should be secondary to sympathy with contemporary

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<sup>47</sup> Pere Michel Hayek, "A Akaba, il y a 4000 ans..." *Le Monde*, June 11-12, 1967, p. 6; See also the full-page coverage devoted to this position on Jun. 14, 1967, p. 5. Italics in the original.

<sup>48</sup> Claiming that they did not have sufficient water reserves to intern them in the Sinai, several Israeli units instead directed Egyptian soldiers to make their own way back to Egyptian lines, rather than take them prisoner. *Le Monde's* journalists interpreted this as a deliberate act of callousness and called the incident "a tragedy without precedent." *Le Monde*, Jun. 14, 1967, p. 1.

<sup>49</sup> Claude Bourdet, "Israel et ses amis..." *Le Monde*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 5. See also Andre Scemama, "Les Israéliens adopteront des positions 'dures' dans la phase diplomatique," *Le Monde*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 4.

Palestinian refugees.<sup>50</sup> By mid-June, *Le Monde* had abandoned the discourse of Israel-as-Holocaust victim completely. One published statement cryptically warned that "Israel doesn't have to treat Arab refugees like they [themselves] were treated by the Germans," while a front-page critique of Israeli policy expressed exasperation at Israeli "monopolizing on the capital of Auschwitz" and "exclusivism [that] has an ethno-religious coloring." The same piece, however, paradoxically rejected the possibility that Israel could become "a state like any other."<sup>51</sup> With these striking shifts in the balance of its commentary and an increasing willingness to editorialize in the aftermath of the Six Day War, it is clear that the experience of the war itself, and the possibilities it opened for significant territorial revisionism, had a profound impact on the paper's understanding of Israel.

By contrast, *L'Humanité's* editors exhibited only minor changes as the war closed, the shift in their perceptions having occurred during the course of the fighting. The paper continued to echo the Soviet Bloc's critiques of Israeli "imperialism," and began to criticize Israeli society itself as "racist," made up of "bankers" with American and West German funding.<sup>52</sup>

Additionally, *L'Humanité* continued to draw connections between pro-Israel support and the OAS as a means of delegitimizing it, characterizing write-in criticism of its reporting as

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<sup>50</sup> Several articles now echoed *L'Humanité*, and argued that sympathy for Israelis stemming from the Holocaust was an injustice to "true" victims of western imperialism, such as the Vietnamese. P. Viansson-Ponte, "L'Opinion, les parties et le conflit," *Le Monde*, Jun. 13, 1967, p. 6; Jean-F. Levy, "L'Autre Antisemitisme," *Le Monde*, Jun. 17, 1967, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Arnold Toynbee, "Les juifs ne doivent pas traiter les refugies arabes comme ils on eux-memes ete traites par les allemands", declare l'historien A. Toynbee," *Le Monde*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 10; P. Vidal-Naquet, "Après," *Le Monde*, Jun. 13, 1967, p. 1 and 3.

<sup>52</sup> One such exasperated headline read "Tel Aviv speaks of negotiations...but also 'builds a new structure!' and annexes Jerusalem and the Sinai!" *L'Humanité*, "Tel-Aviv parle de negociations...mais aussi de "batir une nouvelle structure!" et d'annexer Jerusalem et le Sinai!" Jun. 10, 1967, p. 3; Yves Moreau, "Par le fer et par le feu," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 10, 1967, p. 1; *L'Humanité*, "Dans notre courrier," Jun. 12, 1967, p. 2; Rene Andrieu, "Prime a L'Agression?" *L'Humanité*, Jun. 12, 1967, p. 1 and 4; *L'Humanité*, "Dans notre courrier," Jun. 12, 1967, p. 2; Jacques Couland, "Depuis de longue annees, Britanniques et Americains favorisent l'expansionnisme israelien," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 15, 1967, p. 2; Jacques Couland, "Le droits de l'homme en Israel," *L'Humanité*, Jun. 12, 1967, p. 4.

comparable to that it received from OAS supporters during the Algerian war.<sup>53</sup> Accordingly, over a few short weeks, *L'Humanité's* discourse on Israel had shifted from one of limited critique rooted in anti-Americanism to an outright hostility that echoed the language emerging from the Arab world and Soviet bloc, evidencing significant changes to its editors' understandings of Israel as they reframed it as an active participant in a global war of imperialist aggression.

Israel's 1967 victory sent shockwaves of surprise throughout France, and this surprise reverberated through the French mainstream media. Whereas *Le Monde*, *Le Figaro*, and *L'Humanité* shared an initial concern for Israel's survival, by war's end the papers' positions had starkly diverged. *Le Figaro* had adopted a triumphalist, religiously-charged discourse that posited an Israeli duality—half Holocaust survivor, half Maccabee—and took a vicarious pride in the Israeli victory. *Le Monde*, by contrast, maintained its emotional distance until after the shooting had stopped. As the conflict moved from the battlefield to the negotiating table, the paper's thorough reporting of French sympathy for Israel gave way to territorial revisionism, religious anxiety, and critique as Israel assumed the mantle of the victor. *L'Humanité* also reassessed its understanding of Israel over the course of the war, as muted prewar assertions of Israel's right to exist were replaced by condemnations of imperialist aggression.

Charting these developments has revealed the centrality of the war experience as a turning point in French public discourse on Israel, and indicates that the discursive changes these papers exhibited were responsive to different events: *L'Humanité's* support of the Arab "anti-imperialist" governments, for example, utterly outweighed the importance of Palestinian refugees in the paper's reporting. Finally, this analysis shows that de Gaulle's interpretation of the war was far from dominant, and indicates that French public discourse on Israel was fractured and diverse, far from the monolith that polling data would suggest. Only by engaging with these

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<sup>53</sup> *L'Humanité*, "Dans notre courrier," Jun. 12, 1967, p. 2.

discursive currents can we contextualize the Gaullist turn away from Israel in 1967, and the more gradual shift in French public discourse about Israel that followed.

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