

SORBY, Karol R. *Jún 1967. Šesť dní, ktoré zmenili Blízky východ*. [June 1967. The Six Days that Changed the Middle East]. Bratislava: Slovak Academic Press, 2010. 519 p. ISBN 978-80-8095-065-1. In Slovak.

Historical works treating themes of Eastern countries have been traditionally rare in Czech and Slovak scientific production and this claim is all the more valid in the field of modern history. After more than forty years, the Six Day War of 1967 is still a fascinating turning point in the Middle Eastern history, world politics and international relations. It marked the end of the vision of Jamal Abdel Nasser, the leader of the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and president of the UAR, to achieve Arab unity and establish an Arab regional power in the Middle East that would be a worthy player in the international political arena.

In his outstanding work Karol Sorby uncovers a vivid story leading up to a dramatic climax in June 1967. Using Egyptian, British, American, Russian and Israeli sources, he recreates the drama of diplomatic manoeuvring, Middle Eastern intrigues, elaborate conspiracies, and monumental blunders. June 1967 is a study not only of power politics but of powerful personalities, leading the opposite camps in this fateful conflict.

For more than four decades, historians, publicists and journalists have been trying to understand the reasons leading to war and to the humiliating defeat of the Arabs. The work under review is attractive not just due to the remarkable subject it covers, but also due to the way the subject had been approached. It is not a military history, though this aspect is also sufficiently treated, but rather a presentation of a vivid picture of internal as well as international political developments in the Middle East in the period from the end of the Suez War of 1956 until the formal closing of the June War of 1967 by the passing of UN Security Council Resolution 242 in November 1967. In that way, the author extends his comprehensive monograph on the Suez Crisis and the 1956 War and smoothly passes in his explanation to another complex period in the development of that region. Its climax was the crisis in May 1967, which led to war and its half-hearted closure in the UN Security Council.

By this book, Dr. Karol Sorby, a senior research fellow in the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Slovak Academy of Sciences, proves that he is familiar both with the problems of world politics, especially those connected with the Arab world, and the problems of the historical development in the Middle Eastern countries. In this work based on many sources he analyses key events and acquaints the reader with key personalities and appraises their strengths and weaknesses. He also evaluates the limits of regional players in influencing the policy of the USA and USSR superpowers in the period of the first glimmer of “détente” in the ongoing Cold War and their efforts to avoid a nuclear conflict.

The book is divided into six comprehensive chapters. The content of each chapter of the work elucidates in detail the different aspects of the course which took “the Suez adventure” or “the tripartite aggression” of 1956 to another round of armed confrontation between Arabs and Israelis after 11 years. Taking into consideration the fact that author is an outstanding Arabist and has spent many years in Arab countries, not only as a research fellow but also as the Slovak ambassador to Iraq; his work also

brings a less known perspective on the escalation of conflict from the Arab point of view.

In the first chapter named “The Middle East as an object of power politics after the Suez war” the author gives an analysis of complex international relations in the region. He points to the gradual incursion of the USSR into the Middle East, which was made easier due to the unconditional support of Israel by the USA and other Western powers. In the second chapter called “Inter-Arab relations after the Suez War” the author sheds light on relations between the Arab countries within the League of Arab States which could not come closer or unite because of deep ideological and social contradictions between “revolutionary” and “reactionary” regimes. The third chapter “The Israeli factor in Arab politics” deals with the problem which began in 1948 with the creation of the Jewish State of Israel: the problem of the indigenous populace with a new militant neighbour. The next chapter “Escalation of the crisis in May 1967” is dedicated to the growing tension between Israel and Egypt and the unsuccessful diplomatic efforts to settle the conflict peacefully. On the basis of available documents and sources, the author assumes that the high command of the Israeli army had been prepared for a military solution to the conflict with the Arabs since the end of 1966 and was only waiting for a suitable opportunity. The author argues that Israel had an excellently trained and well-equipped army and outstanding intelligence services, so that the legend of a poor victim struggling for its fragile existence against the enemy’s overwhelming superiority could not stand scrutiny. In the fifth chapter “Israel’s assault on Egypt without declaration of war” the author underlines the excellently prepared and initially surprising pre-emptive air attack which over three hours destroyed the Arab air force and the subsequent well-planned and organized Sinai campaign. On the other hand he highlights the causes of the disastrous Arab defeat, which lay in the huge miscalculations and blunders by the Egyptian high command. The last chapter “Arab struggle for the removal of the consequences of the aggression” shows how Egypt after the humiliating defeat of its army had to begin from zero and had to build its armed forces anew. The decisive task for the Arabs was to do everything for the returning of the territories lost in the war. The ambiguous UN Security Council Resolution 242 of November 1967 closed the conflict formally, but it did not solve the problem and only pushed it forward, so that after six years a new round in Arab-Israeli armed conflict took place. The way to a just and lasting peace in the Middle East is still open.

In his work Dr. Sorby uses a wide heuristic base: the list of used sources and literature points to an extraordinary understanding of all issues related to the subject, and both for scholars and students this book would be a reliable guide for further study. This is an even-handed and well-researched work, which exploits Arab sources to an extent unparalleled in Central European historiography. This balanced account is insightful, often fascinating, always judicious and readable. The monograph under review is an excellent historical work surpassing the standard level of works treating the same subject. It will undoubtedly find its place in the wider scientific research Near Eastern history of the twentieth century.

*Jan Wanner*