

Robert David Johnson

**Lyndon Johnson and Israel:
The Secret Presidential Recordings**



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Cover photo: President Johnson huddling with advisors during the Six Day War. Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara sits at the end of the table, to Johnson's right; Secretary of State Dean Rusk sits across the table from McNamara, with former National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy to Rusk's right. Johnson confidante Clark Clifford sits next to the President, reaching across the table. [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

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PREFACE

There is a common tendency among both professional historians and the general public to project back the dominant patterns of the present. America's relationship with Israel is an excellent case in point. It is perceived as a close, intimate relationship, an alliance between a superpower and a kindred, small state in one of the world's most problematic regions. Terms such as "special relationship" and "commitment" are often employed to describe it. It is commonly assumed that this has always been the case. President Truman's Administration recognized the new state of Israel minutes after its declaration of independence. It is quite easy to draw a direct, continuous line from May 1948 to President Bush's powerful speech in the Knesset sixty years later during a visit designed to underscore his personal and America's strong friendship with Israel as the latter was celebrating its 60 Anniversary. But a closer look reveals a much more complex reality. President Truman's recognition of Israel met with a strong opposition by his Secretary of State, George Marshall. During Israel's first decade its relationship with the U.S. was often awkward as the U.S. was trying to come to terms with Arab nationalism in both its moderate and radical versions. It was only in 1958 when President Eisenhower decided to abandon that effort that the construction of a durable strategic partnership with Israel began.

John Kennedy's relationship with Israel was complex, Israel's quest for a nuclear option being the single most important compounding issue. Against this backdrop, Lyndon Johnson's role as "The great consolidator" of Washington's relationship with Israel seems all the more prominent. The decisions he took on the eve of the Six Days War and its aftermath had a major, lingering impact. It is fortunate that Professor Robert David Johnson was able to rely on troves of new archival material to illuminate President Johnson's policies in regard to Israel and the Middle East and the fashion in which they were made. Tel-Aviv University through its Daniel S. Abraham Center is privileged to be able to publish this innovative monograph.

Itamar Rabinovich,
The Yona and Dina Ettinger Chair for Contemporary Middle Eastern History,
Tel-Aviv University.

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Introduction

In many ways, Lyndon Johnson can be regarded as the U.S. President most favorably disposed toward Israel. His national security bureaucracy was far more suspicious than its recent counterparts of the U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership; Johnson also faced increasing domestic opposition to his management of foreign policy. Yet LBJ consistently backed Israel at critical moments during his presidency. He did so, moreover, by overruling policies recommended by the State Department—despite his general inclination to follow the department's guidance on international matters.

Preoccupied by events in Southeast Asia and the collapse of his coalition at home, Johnson involved himself only sporadically on Middle Eastern matters, and never developed anything resembling a grand strategy for U.S. policy toward the region. A few basic assumptions about issues involving Israel nonetheless guided his approach to the region. Beyond his sympathy for upholding Israeli security, Johnson demonstrated a skittishness about being pulled into Israeli domestic politics, a desire to uphold Jordanian independence, and a fear of providing an opening for the Soviet Union in the Levant.

In the last few years, the release of two sets of primary sources provides more context for understanding Johnson's approach toward Israel; this essay relies on these sources. In 2004, the State Department Historian's Office completed work on the *Foreign Relations of the United States* volumes dealing with the Six Day War and its diplomatic aftermath. The FRUS series, which dates from 1861, includes correspondence and memoranda from the State Department, White House, Defense Department, and CIA.

A second set of primary source material appeared more recently: in October 2007, the National Archives released the 1967 telephone conversations of Lyndon Johnson. Between 1962 and 1973, Presidents John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon secretly recorded nearly 5000 hours of meetings and telephone conversations. (Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Harry Truman, and Dwight Eisenhower also did some taping, although in minimal amounts.) In late June 1962, Kennedy ordered the Secret Service to install recording systems in the Oval Office and Cabinet Room, as well as a system that would allow him to record telephone conversations. The President could activate each by hitting an on/off switch. Kennedy acted, historians Philip Zelikow and Ernest May have speculated, for personal reasons: he planned to write a post-presidential

memoir, and so recorded meetings or conversations that he deemed historically significant.¹

Johnson had a different motivation for recording. The only President to tape for the duration of his administration, Johnson was also the only President to regularly make use of the recordings while in office. He taped because he wanted a record of what he had promised people—and what had been promised him. Johnson relied much less on meetings than had Kennedy, preferring to deal with people over the telephone. (An aide described Johnson as “on the phone morning, noon, and night—almost any hour. He phones from the dinner table, from the bed, from the swimming pool, from the automobile.”²) The new President primarily used the Dictaphone system installed by Kennedy.

Johnson taped extensively in 1964, 1965, and 1968; for reasons that remain unclear, he recorded far fewer calls in 1966 and 1967. The recently released items include no discussions about Johnson’s response to two critical events in U.S.-Israeli relations during the Six Day War: the Israeli attack on the U.S.S. *Liberty* and the U.S. diplomatic pressure on Israel in the hours before the cease-fire. Nonetheless, Johnson’s conversations regarding Israel—which are transcribed for the first time in this essay—provide insight into the President’s basic conception of U.S.-Israeli relations; how he approached both the start of the Six Day War and its diplomatic aftermath; and how Cold War concerns, the significance of Jordan, and the influence of the Israel Lobby affected Johnson’s handling of Middle Eastern matters. Through it all, Johnson’s sympathy for Israel was consistent, if the rationale behind his positions was occasionally peculiar.

¹ Philip Zelikow and Ernest May, *Preface to The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises, volumes 1-3* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2001), pp. xvii-xxiv.

² *U.S. News & World Report*, 13 Jan. 1964.

One: Lyndon Johnson, International Relations, and Israel

Lyndon Baines Johnson was born in Texas, in 1908, the son of a strong-willed mother and a father whose political career had ended in failure. He was educated at Southwest Texas State Teachers College and worked briefly as a public school teacher, but his main interest was politics. Johnson migrated to Washington, DC, in the early 1930s. He worked as a congressional staffer and then New Deal bureaucrat, before winning election to the House of Representatives in 1937.³ His major political break came in 1948, when he captured a Senate primary marred by massive fraud; his 87-vote margin of victory earned him the moniker “Landslide Lyndon.”⁴

Over the next twelve years, Johnson became one of the most powerful legislators in the Senate’s history. In 1953, as Republican Dwight Eisenhower entered the White House, Johnson took over as Senate Democratic leader. Between 1953 and 1959, as Johnson revolutionized the role of party leader, he also transformed the Senate. On the domestic front, he played a key role in securing passage of the first civil rights legislation since Reconstruction (the Civil Rights Act of 1957). In foreign affairs, he developed a reputation for bipartisan cooperation with the Eisenhower administration on issues ranging from upholding the President’s treaty-making power to East Asian policy. Unlike some liberal Democrats, Johnson supported the 1957 Eisenhower Doctrine, in which Congress gave to the President approval to send U.S. troops to the Middle East if Eisenhower determined existence of a communist threat in the region. But two years later, Johnson also recommended that the President consider military aid to Israel, a proposal at odds with Eisenhower’s generally pro-Arab policy toward the region. On other international matters, the senator joined in the party’s late 1950s critique of Eisenhower’s policy as too tolerant of Soviet advances; the Texas senator himself chaired a high-profile Senate investigation of U.S. space policy after the Soviet launch of the Sputnik satellite.⁵

An effective partisan, Johnson helped expand the Democrats’ Senate position from a two-seat minority when he took over as Democratic leader to a thirty-

³ Robert Dallek, *Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, Vol. 1, 1908-1960* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 77.

⁴ Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Volume 2, Means of Ascent* (New York: Knopf, 1990), pp. 255-410.

⁵ Robert Caro, *The Years of Lyndon Johnson: Volume 3, Master of the Senate* (New York: Knopf, 2002), pp. 109-1013; I.L. Kenen, *Israel’s Defense Line: Her Friends and Foes in Washington* (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1981), p. 173.

seat majority by 1959. This growing strength in the Senate only fueled Johnson's national political ambitions, and in 1960 he sought the Democratic nomination for President. Though clearly the most qualified candidate of the field, he failed to understand how the growth of television and the expansion of presidential primaries changed the rules of the nominating process. His chief opponent, Massachusetts senator John Kennedy, mastered the process, and narrowly secured a first-ballot nomination. To widespread surprise, Johnson then agreed to serve as Kennedy's running mate, and critically assisted the ticket in several Southern states. Kennedy's victory made Johnson Vice President.

The vice presidency, however, did not suit this self-described "can-do man." Although Kennedy went out of his way to include Johnson in the decisionmaking process, by 1963, the Vice President's importance had diminished to such an extent that rumors circulated of Kennedy choosing another running mate in 1964. And then, on November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Lyndon Johnson was President.

Johnson's management style differed radically from that of his predecessor. Kennedy preferred a seminar style of decisionmaking, most famously seen in the ExComm meetings during the thirteen days of the Cuban Missile Crisis. He often reached outside the chain of command for advice, particularly to bypass Secretary of State Dean Rusk. And Kennedy saw himself as a foreign policy president, focusing his time and attention on international matters while thinking beyond the norms of Cold War ideology, especially in 1963.

Johnson, on the other hand, rarely engaged lower-level officials in foreign policy discussions. Instead, he preferred to work through the national security leadership he inherited: Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. Facing an election less than a year after taking office, he tailored his foreign policies to advance his perceived political needs. Johnson's personal history made him especially concerned, as a Democratic president, with appearing weak or soft on communism. His two predecessors as Senate Democratic leader (Scott Lucas and Ernest McFarland) lost their re-election bids, amidst the anti-communist fervor associated with McCarthyism and GOP attacks on President Harry Truman's China policy. But beyond political concerns, the new President also seemed to accept the basic tenets of Cold War ideology.

Johnson has a historical reputation as a somewhat passive foreign policy President, a figure handcuffed by his advisors and the unfavorable international trends of the mid-1960s. In fact, he assumed an active—indeed, decisive—role



Lyndon Johnson and Levi Eshkol, in conversation at the White House. "I like Eshkol—I got along with him fine," recalled the President. [Israeli Government Press Office, Item 010870, photograph by Moshe Pridan].

on a host of international issues.⁶ Yet his decisionmaking rationale was often erratic, sometimes motivated by personal pique or stubbornness, and rarely oriented around consistent strategic principles.

Johnson regularly complained about spending too much time meeting foreign leaders and emissaries. Despite this attitude, he enthusiastically welcomed Israeli prime minister Levi Eshkol for a state visit in June 1964. Widely viewed as a caretaker leader when he succeeded David Ben-Gurion in 1963, Eshkol had a reputation as an effective compromiser with an ability to avoid commitments. ("Sure I promised," he was fond of saying, "but did I promise to keep my promise?") Like virtually all Israeli leaders, he sought to tie his nation more closely to the United States. Eshkol and Johnson got along well, and though Israel received no tangible benefits from the visit, the prime minister did obtain the strongest public commitment to Israeli security that an American President had offered to that time. "The United States," Johnson told his visitor, "is foursquare behind Israel on all matters that affect their vital security interests."⁷

Johnson inherited from Kennedy a U.S.-Israeli relationship with two major sticking points: nuclear non-proliferation and arms sales. Kennedy had made nuclear non-proliferation a key goal of U.S. foreign policy just as Ben-Gurion's government committed to developing an Israeli nuclear weapon. The United States had first become aware of the Dimona facility in 1958, but only in late 1960 did Ben-Gurion concede that it was a nuclear facility (intended, he asserted, for "peaceful purposes" only). Within a month of becoming President, Kennedy demanded that Ben-Gurion allow U.S. inspectors to visit the site; the Israeli prime minister responded vaguely, promising to grant such permission at some point in the future. A series of sharp diplomatic exchanges between the two nations crested in 1963, with Israel finally agreeing to inspection just before Ben-Gurion left office. Yet no clear inspections regime was in place when Johnson took over as President.⁸

Meanwhile, Israel looked to the United States as an arms supplier, to supplement or eventually replace its traditional outlets in Western Europe.

⁶ See especially Fredrik Logevall, *Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and the Escalation of the War in Vietnam* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), and Thomas Alan Schwartz, *Lyndon Johnson and Europe: In the Shadow of Vietnam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

⁷ Michael Oren, *Six Days of War: June 1967 and the Making of the Modern Middle East* (New York: Presidio Press, 2002), pp. 26, 50.

⁸ Avner Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), pp. 99-114.

In 1962, John Kennedy made the first major U.S. weapons sale to Israel, when he authorized delivery of Hawk missiles.⁹ Despite such assistance, by the early 1960s, the Arab states were spending a combined \$938 million annually on arms, around twice Israel's level. And the Soviet Union showered Israel's enemies with military assistance, sending \$2 billion in military aid to the region (including 1700 tanks, 2400 artillery pieces, and 500 jets) between 1956 and 1967.¹⁰ Forty-three percent of this total went to Nasser's government in Egypt; between 1961 and 1965 alone, Nasser received 530 T-34, T-54, and T-55 tanks.¹¹

Johnson initially retained his predecessor's approach, if not Kennedy's ardor, regarding Israeli nuclear non-proliferation. But by the time Eshkol arrived in the United States, Johnson already had begun to reassess Washington's standoffish approach to supplying Israel with arms. The first foreign leader received by President Johnson was West German chancellor Ludwig Erhard, who had recently succeeded the Federal Republic's first chancellor, Konrad Adenauer. Erhard traveled to the LBJ Ranch in Johnson City, Texas in December 1963. (The ranch was located in Texas hill country, where a sizeable population of German immigrants dated from the immigration of the late 1840s.) Among the topics—a proposal for West Germany to sell Israel 150 M-48 tanks, with an “option” for nearly 100 more. Erhard feared alienating Arab states should word of the deal become public. Moreover, with a weak political base, the newly installed West German leader risked a domestic backlash from arming Israel. But in the end, Erhard agreed to the President's request provided the details of the deal remained secret and the United States assumed part of the cost.¹²

Johnson's willingness to aid Israel flowed in part from personal concerns. As he told one Israeli diplomat shortly after the assassination, “You have lost a very great friend. But you have found a better one.”¹³ Even though he came from a Texas environment populated by few Jews and fewer Zionists, Johnson had worked closely with a variety of pro-Israel figures before coming to the presidency. In many ways, he owed his political career to Abe Fortas, a committed Zionist and the attorney who masterminded his defense in the 1948 election dispute. Fortas remained a counselor to Johnson throughout his

⁹ Abraham Ben-Zvi, *John F. Kennedy and the Politics of Arms Sales to Israel* (London: Frank Cass, 2002).

¹⁰ Oren, *Six Days of War*, pp. 17, 26.

¹¹ Zach Levey, “The United States' Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966: Strategic Exigencies of an Arms Deal,” *Diplomatic History* 28 (2004), pp. 271-272.

¹² Levey, “The United States' Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966,” pp. 258-62.

¹³ Kenen, *Israel's Defense Line*, p. 173.

career; Johnson named him to a Supreme Court vacancy in 1965.¹⁴ In the 1950s, meanwhile, Johnson used his position as Senate majority leader to build up the Democratic Senate Campaign Committee (DSCC), raising money nationally and then inserting funds into battleground states. This effort brought Johnson into close contact with prominent Jewish labor leaders, such as David Dubinsky of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, and high-profile Jewish financiers, such as Arthur Krim, an entertainment lawyer who served a stint as finance chairman of the Democratic National Committee.¹⁵ Finally, Johnson had something of a romantic view of Israel, seeing it as a frontier state not unlike his home territory of Texas. LBJ aide John Roche explained the attraction: "I look at the Israelis as Texans, and Nasser as Santa Ana."¹⁶

Regional events tested Johnson's commitment to Israel in early 1965, when word of the Israeli-West German tank deal leaked publicly. The deal collapsed, just as Johnson confronted a serious problem in Jordan. As Egypt, Syria, and Iraq drifted toward the Soviet orbit, the small, strategically located Hashemite Kingdom became increasingly important for U.S. interests in the Middle East. Both the United States and Britain had enjoyed a close working relationship with King Hussein since the Jordanian monarch assumed the throne in 1951; in 1958, the British sent more than 2000 troops to Amman after a coup in Iraq sparked fears of unrest in Jordan.¹⁷

In January 1964, largely at Nasser's behest, the nations of the Arab League created the United Arab Command (UAC), tasked with the twin purposes of diverting the waters of the Jordan River away from Israel and forming a unified Arab military front against the Israelis. King Hussein successfully resisted pressure to allow the stationing of Saudi and Iraqi troops within Jordanian territory; such a move would have left him little more than a puppet ruler. Yet he did agree to improve the quality of Jordanian defenses. His message for the United States was simple: if Washington would not sell him the necessary planes and tanks, he would have no choice but to purchase the arms from Moscow—and, as a result, tilt politically toward the Soviet Union.¹⁸

The administration deferred the request through late 1964, but eventually agreed to sell him 46 M-48 tanks and to consider providing U.S.-made F-104 jets

¹⁴ Laura Kalman, *Abe Fortas: A Biography* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 125-276.

¹⁵ Caro, *Master of the Senate*, pp. 406-13.

¹⁶ Douglas Little, "The Making of a Special Relationship: The United States and Israel, 1957-1968," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 25 (1993), pp. 274-5.

¹⁷ Douglas Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer? The United States, King Hussein, and Jordan, 1953-1970," *International History Review* 17 (1995), pp. 512-44.

¹⁸ Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?," pp. 524-5.

as well.¹⁹ The National Security Council reviewed the problem in a February 1, 1965 meeting. U.S. policymakers understood, as Undersecretary of State George Ball noted, that “Jordan, as a member of the Arab club, must purchase additional equipment somewhere—if not from us, then from the USSR . . . There is no good solution to this problem and there are disadvantages from every course of action. If we say no to the supersonics, Jordan will ask Soviet aid. If we say yes, Israel will demand supersonics. Thus, no matter what we do, we will be contributing to the arms race in the Middle East which we have been trying to damp down.”²⁰

Every member of the NSC believed that the necessities of the Cold War dictated approving the Jordanian arms sale. This list included the President, who suggested that “Jordan will get the planes from the Russians if they do not get them from us.”²¹

The problem with this approach, however, was the potential Israeli reaction. Though Israel had covertly cooperated with Hussein’s government, the two nations officially remained in a state of war, and Israel’s security plans assumed a minimal Jordanian military presence in the West Bank. Accordingly, former White House counselor Mike Feldman, Johnson’s liaison to the U.S. Jewish community, told the President that domestic uproar from the Jewish Lobby could produce enough congressional opposition to kill any Jordanian arms deal. No one in Johnson’s senior circle disagreed with the assessment.²²

Working through formal diplomatic channels, the State Department assured the Israelis that any Jordanian “buildup will not threaten existing Israeli overall military superiority over Arabs for [the] foreseeable future.” In any event, the decision constituted the “least unattractive alternative from viewpoint both American and Israeli interests.”²³ Few in Washington were naïve enough to believe that such reasoning would persuade Eshkol’s government. The question, then, was not whether the Jordanian arms sale would require concessions to Israel, but how significant those concessions would be. An aggressive

¹⁹ Levey, “The United States’ Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966,” pp. 256-7.

²⁰ “Summary Notes of the 544th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, February 1, 1965,” *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968 [hereafter FRUS]*, vol. 18. document 130.

²¹ “Summary Notes of the 544th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, February 1, 1965,” *FRUS*, vol. 18. document 130.

²² “Summary Notes of the 544th Meeting of the National Security Council, Washington, February 1, 1965,” *FRUS*, vol. 18, document 130.

²³ “Telegram from the Department of State [Ball] to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, February 1, 1965, 9:02pm,” *FRUS*, vol. 18, document 131.

nonproliferation policy was the first to fall: Robert Komer conceded that the United States would need to defer pressure about Dimona “till we get Jordan arms sorted out.”²⁴

Perhaps better than anyone else in the administration, Komer recognized the dilemma that Johnson faced. Described by the *New York Times* as a “model of what the novelist John le Carré calls an intellocrat,” Komer in 1965 was serving as an NSC staffer whose responsibility included Middle Eastern matters, en route to a career that would see him in charge of the pacification program in South Vietnam, U.S. ambassador to Turkey, and undersecretary of defense.²⁵ In a memorandum to the President penned in early February, Komer argued, “Our real aim is simply to get through this new crisis without: (1) sacrificing Israel’s security or getting a domestic black eye for appearing to do so; (2) ruining our relations with the Arabs—along with all this would cost us; (3) letting the Soviets score another major gain in the Near East, as they did in 1954-57,” in the aftermath of the 1956 Suez crisis. The situation, he contended, “will sooner or later require us to sell arms to Israel. The simple reason is that otherwise the growing Soviet arms sales to the Arabs will slowly tilt the balance against Israel . . . [Therefore,] a sale of arms to Jordan could give us the excuse for selling to Israel too. In fact, it would almost compel us to do so. We could justify this publicly as a response to Soviet moves . . . Since this basic policy reversal on our part (from avoiding sales to making them) is probably inevitable, there’s a case for making it now!”²⁶ Komer realized that his recommendation would constitute “a major policy shift”—though, he noted, in some ways “we were inevitably being pushed in this direction anyway,” beginning with the 1962 Hawk deal.²⁷

A few days later, Johnson sent Komer to Tel Aviv, to sound out the Israeli government on the issue. Despite Israel’s obvious need for U.S. arms, Eshkol held a trump card: the ability of the Jewish Lobby to pressure Congress. As George Ball explained, “We very much fear repercussions in Congress affecting whole Middle East policies and perhaps other aspects [of] foreign policy,” with

²⁴ Komer handwritten marginalia, in “Memorandum from the Department of State’s Executive Secretary (Read) to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Washington, February 5, 1965,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 136.

²⁵ *New York Times*, 12 April 2000.

²⁶ “Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, Washington, February 6, 1965,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 138.

²⁷ “Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to the President’s Special Assistant for National Security Affairs (Bundy), Washington, February 7, 1965,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 140.

the "President himself deeply concerned about this aspect."²⁸

From Tel Aviv, Komer continued to argue for selling Israel arms to obtain the Eshkol government's acquiescence to the Jordanian arms package. Both the State Department and McGeorge Bundy, however, still had questions about the policy. On February 14, Bundy and George Ball proposed recalling Komer to Washington for consultations, with the hope of minimizing any commitment given to Eshkol. The President agreed—but, as became clear, with a crucial caveat.

President Johnson and McGeorge Bundy, 1.02pm, 14 February 1965²⁹

McGeorge Bundy: My real business is that Komer is in. And he sounds as if he was getting, to me, a little bit to see a little too much of the Israeli side.

And that leads me to think that his own suggestion—which is that he should have this conversation today, which we don't yet have a report on, then come back here Monday, and concert things with us, and then give them [the Israelis] some sort of definite proposal—is a good one.

There's a conference for Mapai (which is the leading party) for four days, in Israel, beginning Tuesday, and all the politicians will be stirred up.

The only alternative would be to give him something fairly definite to say as early as tomorrow (Monday, Israeli time), and I don't think that we want to move quite that fast. Because if we begin to sound—if we say to the Israelis just before a party conference that we're going into the arms business with them, the chance of a leak in the course of politics, with Ben-Gurion after Eshkol's hide, is very high. And we haven't yet done our homework with Nasser.

Komer is more useful here than there in the process of decision. I'd like to have him here, where he can

²⁸ "Telegram from the Department of State [Ball] of the Embassy in Jordan, Washington, February 8, 1965, 5:36pm," *FRUS*, vol. 18, document 142.

²⁹ *President Johnson and McGeorge Bundy (excerpt)*, 1.02pm, 14 Feb. 1965, *Tape WH6502.03*, Citation #6834, *Recordings of Telephone Conversations—White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings*, Lyndon B. Johnson Library [hereafter *LBJ Recordings*], CD Track One. All transcripts and recordings in this essay were prepared by the author.

be thinking about the impact on Nasser, as well as the impact on Israel.

So that unless you're in a great hurry yourself (and I didn't feel that you were yesterday), I would prefer to let that exploratory mission [by Komer] be closed on the first act and start again with the second act after we've had one more hard look back here in Washington.

This is George Ball's preference, because he would like very much to give this whole issue—give Dean Rusk one more chance to look at this whole issue. Dean will be back here tomorrow. He's always been very reluctant to get into this double arms selling, even though he doesn't see any alternative.

President Johnson: Yes, I agree; I think that's good. I would . . . You might consider having Abe Feinberg and [New York Democratic Party Chairman] Eddie Weisl down in your office—

Bundy: I would like to do that—

President Johnson: Just talk to them.

Bundy: I would like to do that, if you'd authorize it.

President Johnson: Yeah. See if they'd fly down in the morning and just be—

Bundy: [*with President Johnson assenting in background*]: Yeah. Bring them up to date. Why don't I wait till Komer gets back, and let him report to them on Tuesday as well as to us?

President Johnson: That's good.

The presence of Weisl, whose job included safeguarding the interests of New York Jewish voters, and Feinberg, a high-profile Zionist, would frustrate any attempt by the State Department to abandon the sale. A major Democratic fundraiser, Feinberg made his money as chairman of a New York-based apparel manufacturer, Kayser-Roth Corporation, and then as chairman of American Bank and Trust Company; he made his political mark as president of Americans for Haganah. Feinberg's extensive contacts in Israel positioned him as a confidante of Chaim Weizmann; he chaired both the Development Corporation for Israel and the Weizmann Institute of Science.³⁰

³⁰ *New York Times*, 7 Dec. 1998.



President Johnson on the telephone, in the Oval Office. [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

The President also used Feinberg to conduct backchannel diplomacy, to communicate to Eshkol a frank message: Israel would receive U.S. arms only if the Jordanian deal was approved. Equally clear: the President wanted to avoid being dragged into Israeli domestic politics, as figures in Eshkol's cabinet, especially the U.S.-born foreign minister, Golda Meir, attempted to gain political advantage at home by presenting themselves as best equipped to influence events in Washington.

President Johnson and Abe Feinberg, 11.00am, 20 February 1965³¹

Abe Feinberg: It occurs to me that the way to get the voice loud and clear is for you to see someone who the Prime Minister would send over. I would imagine it would be Golda, who you know, who I think could bring you up to the minute on everything that they're thinking.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: We reviewed that a couple of days before, and I would think that would be about the worst thing that could happen. I think we would excite the whole world. It would be worse than the German-Israel fight they're having now.

I can't imagine her getting in to see the President, and having a meeting here with . . .

Feinberg: Of course, she would—

President Johnson: —a junior official—I mean, somebody less than the prime minister—without it circularizing.

Now, I had asked [Averell] Harriman last week, who is very understanding on these things; and Komer—I don't know anybody (he's not emotional as some of our folks are on it, but he's very able, and kindly disposed toward them) . . .

I think it shapes up very simply with every person I have talked to, and I've gone over it with the four top State Department people—the Secretary, the Undersecretary, and the Assistant Secretary, and our ambassadors in the area, including Harriman. I've talked to all the defense people—which is McNamara, and [Cyrus]

³¹ *President Johnson and Abe Feinberg (excerpts), 11.00am, 20 Feb. 1965, Tape WH6502.04, Citation #6861, Citation #6862, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Two.*

Vance, and [Earle] Wheeler.³² I've talked to some of my congressional people, the Foreign Relations [Committee] folks.

We can go one of two ways, and I'm willing to go either way. If the Israel friends in this country want to substitute their judgment about the consequences of Soviet planes, don't think it makes such difference (kind of like Mike [Feldman] argued in meetings up here), I'm prepared to tell my advisors that that is the course. I'd be perfectly willing.

I don't look for much approval on becoming a munitions maker.

Feinberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: I think you just get yourself in a helluva shape. I think that—

Feinberg: [*Unclear.*]

President Johnson: I think Ben-Gurion attacking Eshkol on this German tank deal is just an awful thing for everybody. And the Germans have got out a big a statement denouncing us this morning, and saying that we acted in bad faith.

We did unquestionably ask this poor man [Chancellor Erhard] to send those tanks—and we kind of forced him to do it. And now he did it, and his government's going to fall, because of a fight they got in among themselves over there, according to our intelligence.

Now, I don't want to get in that. I'm friendly to these people, and I want to help them. But . . .

As our people see it, if they [the Israeli government] really, sincerely, genuinely feel that we oughtn't to sell these planes to Jordan, and we oughtn't to sell these tanks (we're giving them as little as we can get by with; Nasser has got their feet to the fire)—well, we won't do it. I'll just say that, and I'm prepared to do it.

And I'm telling Harriman to tell the prime minister that. Because I think it's something that's got to be settled with him . . .

³² *Cyrus Vance was assistant secretary of defense; Earle Wheeler was chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.*

Feinberg: With the prime minister of Israel?

President Johnson: Yeah. Yeah.

And now he's [Harriman] going to say, "Now, you all decide this."

We have indications from our Jewish population in the United States that they think that's the course we ought to follow.

Now, our judgment is we oughtn't to do it. Our judgment is we oughtn't to let this little king [King Hussein] go down the river. He's got a million-and-a-half people, and he only controls a third of them—two-thirds [are] against him.

But he is the only voice that will stand up there. And if you want to turn him over and have a complete Soviet bloc, why, we'll just have to—and we'll get out of the arms business. We just . . .

And we think . . . We'll have to get out of supplying Jordan with money. And we think when we do that, it will cause pressure to really be—when that story comes out—it will be on the whole \$100 million that goes to Jordan, and to Israel, too.

But we'll fight that when we come to it. We'll deprive Jordan of their aid. We'll tell them, "No more aid, no more munitions. No more nothing. We're not going to get into manufacturing munitions," and so on and so forth. If that's what they [the Israelis] think.

We think it would be better to give them [Jordan] as little as possible, and control it. And all of our defense people think it would be.

But I'm not prepared to take on the *New York Times* and Mike Feldman and everybody else. [Feinberg chuckles.] I'm going to let them make the decision.

And if they—but it's got to be in or out. If we go in, [then] of course, we've got to be of some help to Israel. If we get out, then we just got to say, "Well, we're not taking part. We're not going to supply arms to one side or the other. We're just not going to be in here to sell a lot of munitions."

[Break.]

President Johnson: The only reason I'm helping Jordan is on account of Israel. Now, if Israel doesn't—if Israel considers them their enemy, and not of help, then we just wasted 600 million [dollars, in military aid to Jordan].

Feinberg: Mr. President, do I understand that Averell is going?

President Johnson: Yeah.

[*Break.*]

Feinberg: That's in lieu of her [Golda Meir] coming here, right?

President Johnson: Well, I never had considered that. I never had felt that was desirable. I think that couldn't do anything but heat it up.

I can't imagine her getting off [the plane] with a suitcase without somebody saying, "Why?"

Feinberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: And then I don't want to get another Arab/Ben-Gurion/Eshkol/Erhard election in this thing if I can avoid it.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: My judgment is, and it's Rusk's judgment (and I don't believe it's an emotional judgment; but I believe it's a friendly judgment) that this little king has some value to us, and that we ought to keep him as far away from the Soviet and Nasser as we can.

The Israelis, though, don't think so. Well, if they don't, we'll just pull out; we won't sell him a damn thing. But we want it to be clear it's their decision. And we want it to be clear that we're doing it so we can satisfy the Jews, and not irritate them.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: And [Harriman can] just say, "Now, Mr. Prime Minister, we want to accommodate you; which route do you want? Do you want us out of here, or do you want us in?"

Feinberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: "And we're going to let you write the decision, but we want your name signed in it, and we want your people signed in it. And we don't want it laid

on to a man from Johnson City." [*Feinberg chuckles.*]
[*Break.*]

President Johnson: I want to work with them [the Israelis], and want to help them. But I don't see the thing as they see it. They're emotional; they see it right there on their border. They know the problems. I think that maybe our people are not as . . . may not be as wise. I'm willing to just follow . . .

I like Eshkol—I got along with him fine. I got along with Ben-Gurion fine. I spent a lot of time with him, back when they were in real problems, and they were getting ready to [impose] sanctions [in 1963, over Dimona]. I just came down here and said, "Hell, no, that can't be."

Feinberg: I remember that.

President Johnson: And I stopped it.

But they fight among themselves over there, and I'm not going to get in the middle of one of these clashes—have one of them leak it on me that I want to join up with the Arabs.

Feinberg: Well, I gather that, for proper diplomatic reasons, you think that Golda's [Meir] visit here would be—

President Johnson: I just think it would—I think it would inflame the whole world. I think that the Germans would wonder if she's coming to mess in that thing. I think that the Arabs would say, "Good God, what's Johnson doing in here?" I think the Jews would all start sending telegrams . . .

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: We think—all of our people think—that the place for this decision is the Prime Minister of Israel. He's talking to us, and he's making it clear what his position is. But the ambassador's kind of taking a different position.

And we gather, from what [Israeli ambassador to the United States Avraham] Harman says to you, and what we hear from other reports, that he feels that it's better to go the other way.

Well, now, just to be perfectly blunt about it, I

don't want to persuade him.

Feinberg: I know.

President Johnson: I just don't want to be in a position of trying to force him to do something.

So I'm going to just say to Eshkol, "Now, here's what we get. We get this reaction over there. And we get this reaction from you. And Averell will tell you what we'll do.

"If you want us to limit out thing [arms aid] and control them [Jordan], and try to finish out your thing [the German tank deal], and supply you, we'll furnish both of you. If you don't want that, we'll furnish nobody. Now, whatever you think you'd rather do. And you just make a decision, and then you get a hold of Abe Feinberg, who's the man I trust most, and tell him.

"And then I want some editorials asking me to do it. I don't want to be out there on a limb that I've got to walk back on."

Feinberg: You mean, asking you not to do it?

President Johnson: Yeah, asking me to either supply 'em both, or not to supply 'em.

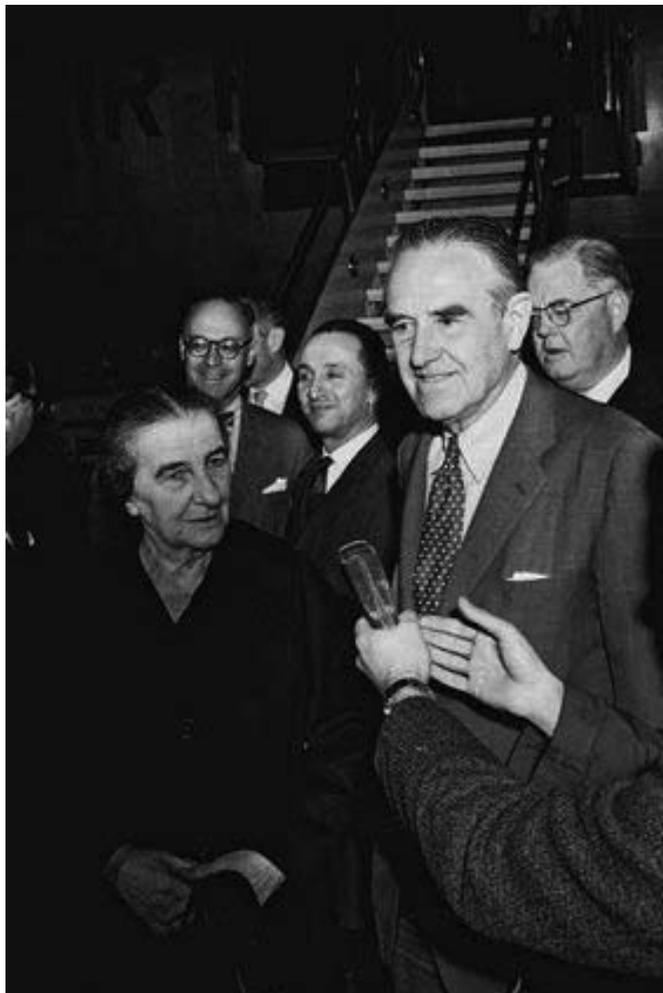
Feinberg: Uh-huh.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: Now, I cannot imagine any Jew in America getting mad at me for saying, "Mr. Prime Minister, you write the ticket."

Feinberg: No.

President Johnson: Can you?



Averell Harriman, with Foreign Minister Golda Meir upon Harriman's arrival in Israel, February 24, 1965. Johnson wanted Harriman in Tel Aviv, not Meir in Washington: "I can't imagine her getting off [the plane] with a suitcase without somebody saying, 'Why?'" [Israeli Government Press Office, Item 023184, photograph by Fritz Cohen.]

Feinberg relayed the President's terms, but Eshkol continued to hold out. Harriman soon joined Komer in Tel Aviv, tasked with reviewing all facets of the U.S.-Israeli relationship except for economic aid. The Ambassador-at-Large stressed to his hosts the "historic significance of President's willingness to consider direct arms supply."³³ The prime minister, however, "couldn't say that he agreed to actual US sales to Jordan, which would promptly be publicized by Arabs and then seized upon by his political foes, in return for [a] generalized and secret promise US in principle agreed to unspecified direct sales to Israel at some future date."³⁴

Harriman and Komer found it "increasingly clear" that the key to matter was how "Eshkol, with his relatively unstable coalition government, faces real difficulty in carrying his Cabinet even as far as tacit acceptance [of] US arms sales to Jordan."³⁵ With an election pending and Ben-Gurion excoriating his successor for not doing enough to ensure Israeli security, Eshkol needed more than a weak guarantee from the United States.³⁶ Moreover, both soon realized that Harriman's initial portfolio was too wide—their mission should focus on the short-term question of an arms deal with Israel, and postpone consideration of broader matters for another day.

In Washington, Rusk and Ball insisted that the United States could commit only to "sympathetically" considering a future Israeli request that the United States fulfill the terms of the West German tanks sale.³⁷ At a decisive moment—if for unusual reasons—Johnson informed Rusk that the United States needed to go further in addressing Eshkol's concerns. The President, in short, had tired of the diplomatic exchanges with Israel, and was willing to give in to Eshkol.

³³ "Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, February 26, 1965, 9:45pm," FRUS, vol. 18, document 161.

³⁴ "Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, February 27, 1965, midnight," FRUS, vol. 18, document 163.

³⁵ "Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, February 28, 1965, 4am," FRUS, vol. 18, document 165.

³⁶ Levey, "The United States' Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966," p. 265.

³⁷ "Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, February 28, 1965, 11pm," FRUS, vol. 18, document 167.

President Johnson and Dean Rusk, 6.50pm, 28 February 1965³⁸

Dean Rusk: [*reading from proposed telegram for Averell Harriman to present to Prime Minister Eshkol*] " . . . Our deep concern about unification of Arab world behind Nasser with close working relationships with Soviet bloc is [the] greatest threat to Israel we can imagine. The fact that it would be deeply injurious to U.S. interests in Near East, including the security of Israel, seems to us to require that we and Israel would together to head it off. We agree to a private visit to Washington of [Shimon] Peres and [Yitzhak] Rabin. Must emphasize absence of publicity for such visit, as was accomplished on earlier occasions." . . .

President Johnson: I had this feeling—I don't know if it's any good, but, God, I hate to transfer all those Jews into Washington, though, because I'm afraid that they'll all move in at the slightest provocation. I wouldn't be surprised if Golda's [Meir] not on her way if we don't watch.

But maybe not.

Do you think that we could say to Averell to strike out the "sympathetically," and say, "We pledge to give you *x* tanks, and give them the *x* tanks, plus a little beyond the tanks—without any planes? It seems that the basis of his [Eshkol's] objection is that [the U.S. saying] "we view sympathetically" doesn't commit us.

Rusk: Uh-huh.

President Johnson: And that he wants a commitment.

It seems that we might, without great danger, raise the ante a little bit to what the Germans are giving them, and say if the Germans don't complete it, we'll complete it, plus 20 or something.

³⁸ *President Johnson and Dean Rusk (excerpt), 6.50pm, 20 Feb. 1965, Tape WH6502.06, Citation #6898, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Three.*

The next day, Rusk communicated the new policy to Harriman and Komer.³⁹ The U.S. government, now fully cognizant of “Israeli concerns,” was “prepared to sell military equipment to Israel comparable in quantities and kinds to the equipment that the United States sells to Jordan to preclude the Soviet supply of arms through the UAC to Jordan.” Rusk placed several caveats on the offer—namely, that Israel not consider the arms sale a precedent, and that Eshkol “make a commitment not to oppose our offer to Jordan and to keep all aspects entire agreement completely secret until both governments agree on appropriate publicity.”⁴⁰

As Johnson had suggested, the United States ultimately offered Israel a slightly more favorable arrangement than what the Eshkol government had enjoyed with West Germany. Johnson promised 100 tanks to match the sale of U.S. tanks to Jordan, plus an additional 90 M-48A1 or M-48A3 tanks if—as was widely expected—West Germany did not revive its agreement with Israel. The President also committed to providing Israel with “a few” planes (defined as “less than 20,” though the actual total wound up being 24, or four more than what Jordan received)—provided that Israel first pursue purchase options in Western Europe and Eshkol promise that “Israel will not attack Jordan arms sale and that friends of Israel in the US will be given clear private guidance on this point.”⁴¹ Reflecting on the exchanges, Komer concluded, “We finally came out all right—and without giving more than we’d have to give sooner or later anyway to our Israeli friends.”⁴²

At the time, McGeorge Bundy reported, the President’s chief priority was to “turn talks away from an open-ended arms commitment.”⁴³ A few months later, however, Johnson summed up his role in a quite different way, in a conversation with Connecticut senator Abraham Ribicoff.

³⁹ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel,” Washington, March 1, 1965, 12:02am,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 169.

⁴⁰ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, March 3, 1965, 10:48pm,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 175.

⁴¹ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, March 8, 1965, 8:57pm,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 182.

⁴² “Memorandum from Robert W. Komer of the National Security Council Staff to President Johnson, Washington, March 13, 1965,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 190.

⁴³ “Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel,” Washington, March 7, 1965, 6:53pm,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 181.

President Johnson and Abraham Ribicoff, 8.45am, 1 September 1965⁴⁴

President Johnson: I had a long wire from Eshkol yesterday—a real good one—on my birthday. I have really saved him, and gone to bat with his equipment and stuff. I've done it quietly, and, I think, quite effectively.

I made the Germans give him tanks first. And then Ben-Gurion leaked it out, and got them in trouble, and damn near beat old man Erhard.⁴⁵ But then I took over his order, and I did it myself.

⁴⁴ *President Johnson and Abraham Ribicoff (excerpt), 8.45am, 1 Sept. 1965, Tape WH6509.01, Citation #8801, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Four.*

⁴⁵ *In fact, the leak seemed to have come from West German sources.*

Two: U.S. Diplomacy and the Path to the Six-Day War

Shortly after the dual-nation arms sale was authorized, the CIA, State Department, and Defense Department produced a National Intelligence Estimate on the Arab-Israeli problem. The NIE concluded that “the Arab-Israeli dispute is heating up . . . Arab cooperation and the new willingness of richer Arab states to contribute funds to the program have led the Israelis to fear that a significant turning point in the dispute is occurring to Nasser’s advantage. In response, they are hardening their posture toward the Arabs. In this situation, tension will be higher in the next few years and the danger of armed clashes greater.” Regardless of whether war ensued, the NIE predicted “it will almost certainly be more difficult in the next few years for the US and other Western powers to maintain satisfactory relations with both Israel and the Arab states. The dispute will present the USSR with opportunities to increase its influence with the Arabs.”⁴⁶ Providing Jordan with U.S. arms might have purchased the United States some time, but, as George Ball privately told Dean Rusk, “It is an unattractive situation no matter how you slice it.”⁴⁷

U.S. policymakers hoped that the 1965 tank sale would not constitute a precedent, but the reality was far different. In early 1966, the United States agreed to sell Israel forty-eight A-4 Skyhawk jet bombers, hoping both to defer pressure from Eshkol for an explicit U.S. security guarantee and to obtain Israeli acquiescence for a similar package to Jordan. Johnson and his advisors continued to deny that the move shifted U.S. policy regarding military aid, but the Israeli leadership had a different interpretation. Abba Eban, who had replaced Meir as foreign minister, privately termed the sale “a development of tremendous political value,” a step forward in the Israeli policy of striving “for a continued intensification of the existing U.S. commitment and the creation of sui generic strategic relations.”⁴⁸

Developments in the Middle East made the Skyhawk sale one of the few pieces of good news for Eshkol in 1966. To the north, Syria, fortified by Soviet diplomatic and military support, sponsored regular Palestinian fedayeen raids against Israel. (Visiting the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Townsend Hoopes, the Pentagon’s Deputy for International Security Affairs, scowled, “The Syrians are

⁴⁶ “National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 30-65, Washington, March 10, 1965,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 187.

⁴⁷ “Record of Telephone Conversation between Secretary of State Rusk and the Under Secretary of State (Ball), Washington, February 5, 1965, 7pm,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 135.

⁴⁸ Levey, “The United States’ Skyhawk Sale to Israel, 1966,” p. 274.

sons of bitches.”⁴⁹) Israel’s enemies further strengthened their strategic position in October 1966, when Egypt and Syria signed a mutual defense pact that restored the two nations’ military ties, which had weakened after the dissolution of the United Arab Republic in 1961. Domestically, the Eshkol government struggled to fend off attacks from critics, such as Ben-Gurion, who contended it had not done enough to prevent terrorist attacks on Israeli soil.

Under such pressure, on November 13, 1966, Eshkol authorized a raid into the West Bank—“Operation Shredder”—to retaliate against Arab villages that had supported Palestinian terrorist attacks inside the country. Jordanian troops were not expected to be in the area; the IDF planned a surgical strike and quick withdrawal. But a group of 100 Jordanian soldiers happened to be passing through Samu, an Arab village of around 5000, shortly after the Israelis arrived. In the resulting battle, fifteen Jordanian soldiers and three Arab civilians were killed (the IDF commander of the raid also lost his life). And in the aftermath, anti-government riots broke out throughout the West Bank, threatening to destabilize King Hussein’s pro-Western regime.⁵⁰

The U.S. response to the Samu raid was swift and harsh. The new National Security Advisor, Walt Rostow (McGeorge Bundy had resigned to accept the presidency of the Ford Foundation), described U.S. policy as designed “to jolt Israeli leaders into realizing that they can’t go on looking to us for protection over the long haul unless they make some effort of their own to coexist with their neighbors.”⁵¹ Privately, he wondered if Eshkol had acted in a Machiavellian fashion to destabilize Jordan, so that “Israel would not be in an embarrassing position where one of its friends among the Great Powers would also be a friend of an Arab country.”⁵²

Rusk lectured Israeli Ambassador Avraham Harman that Israel “faces basically police problem, and police measures rather than disproportionate military attacks were the answer.”⁵³ Undersecretary of State Nick Katzenbach was even blunter with Foreign Minister Eban, telling him, “Now you have to take the consequences of what you did.”⁵⁴ The U.S. ambassador in Tel Aviv,

⁴⁹ Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 44.

⁵⁰ Oren, *Six Days of War*, pp. 33-34; Clea Lutz Bunch, “Strike at Samu: Jordan, Israel, the United States and the Origins of the Six-Day War,” *Diplomatic History* 32 (2008), pp. 55-76.

⁵¹ “Telegram from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas, Washington, November 20, 1966, 1820Z,” *FRUS*, vol. 18, document 339.

⁵² Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 34.

⁵³ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, November 22, 1966, 10:24am,” *FRUS*, vol. 18, document 343.

⁵⁴ Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 34.

Walworth Barbour, termed the attack “particularly embarrassing” in both timing and target.⁵⁵ At Rusk’s insistence, he refused Eshkol’s request to communicate a private apology to King Hussein. Tapping into informal diplomatic channels, Komer phoned Abe Feinberg, “to pass the blunt word that Israel was ‘going too far’ in striking Jordan”; Feinberg agreed to “get the word direct to Eshkol.”⁵⁶ Johnson, meanwhile, worried that the U.S. response might not be sharp enough; he avoided a direct protest to Eshkol only because “another message may be necessary later.”⁵⁷

While the President rejected suggestions from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to withhold U.S. military aid to Israel to protest the raid, the United States joined a unanimous Security Council (with one abstention) in censuring the Eshkol government.⁵⁸ Security Council Resolution 228, co-sponsored by Nigeria and Mali, described the raid as “a large-scale and carefully planned military action on the territory of Jordan by the armed forces of Israel,” and warned that a repeat action would lead the Security Council “to consider further and more effective steps as envisaged in the Charter to ensure against the repetition of such acts.”⁵⁹

An immediate CIA analysis confirmed the political and diplomatic damage from the operation. A special memorandum argued that Samu made King Hussein “vulnerable to attack by disaffected elements of his population, who argue that his policy of peaceful coexistence with Israel has been dictated by the US and has proved a failure. There is a glaring contrast between Israeli treatment of Jordan and of Syria, which had severely provoked the Israelis, had received public Soviet support, and had been left alone by Tel Aviv’s army.” (The CIA correctly assumed that Israel had attacked Jordan and not Syria due to fears of harming Israeli relations with Syria’s chief international patron, the Soviet Union.) The raid, agency analysts concluded, “seems illogical and

⁵⁵ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, November 13, 1966, 3:25pm,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 332.

⁵⁶ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Komer) to President Johnson, Washington, November 16, 1966,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 336.

⁵⁷ “Telegram from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas, Washington, November 20, 1966, 1820Z,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 339.

⁵⁸ “Memorandum from the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, JCSM-751-66, Washington, December 5, 1966,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 357.

⁵⁹ “Resolution 228,” <http://domino.un.org/unispal.NSF/59c118f065c4465b852572a500625fea/1a03c7bfb8d6c049852560c3004a4aaf!OpenDocument>, accessed 2 March 2008.

miscalculated to us.”⁶⁰

About a month after Samu, Johnson professed still to be baffled as to the Israelis’ decisionmaking process, in a conversation with the most ardently pro-Israel member of his cabinet, UN ambassador Arthur Goldberg.

President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg, 5.40pm, 13 December 1966⁶¹

President Johnson: Have you got—have you got Jordan and Israel? I told them not to pee a drop on India, Pakistan, or Jordan and Israel without you. Have they checked all this stuff?

Arthur Goldberg: Nick [Katzenbach] gave you a memorandum of our conversation.⁶² And I’ve asked the Israel ambassador [to the United States], Abe Harman. He’ll come and see me Friday morning and I’ll get back to you.

President Johnson: What we’ll do is at the proper time—we won’t be chinchy with them, we’ll go back to Africa or something else. We can’t make a deal.

But I just think they’re damn fools to let [King] Hussein get thrown out.

Goldberg: Yeah, I think they know that. And I’ll be glad to talk to them.

President Johnson: All right. OK.

As the Eshkol government’s strategic position deteriorated, aid to Israel became entangled in an institutional struggle for control of U.S. foreign policy. After World War II, two traditional tools for Congress to influence foreign policy—the power to declare war, and the Senate’s role in approving treaties—atrophied.

⁶⁰ “Special Memorandum Prepared in the Central Intelligence Agency, No. 19-66 Washington, November 18, 1966,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 338.

⁶¹ *President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg (excerpt), 5.40pm, 13 Dec. 1966, Tape WH6512.02, Citation #11130, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Five.*

⁶² *In the conversation, Goldberg agreed with Katzenbach’s position that the United States should accelerate delivery of \$6 million in defensive weapons with Jordan. He doubted Eshkol would oppose the move, provided the United States consider accelerating delivery of Skyhawks to Israel. Even so, Katzenbach reported that the ambassador “believes that we are likely to have a sizable domestic problem with respect to the increment [to Jordan] even if the Israeli Government quietly agrees to it.” “Memorandum from Acting Secretary of State Katzenbach to President Johnson,” Washington, December 12, 1966,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 365.*

Rather than coming to Congress for a war declaration, Presidents cited their power as commander-in-chief (as Harry Truman did in Korea) or requested open-ended authorizations for future policies (as Eisenhower did with the Middle East Resolution or Johnson did in Vietnam). Meanwhile, Presidents turned to executive agreements—which could be arranged without any congressional role—rather than treaties for implementing controversial arrangements with other nations.

Regarding a third foreign policy tool, however, the congressional role expanded after 1945. Beginning with the Marshall Plan and continuing through 1950s and 1960s economic and military aid packages, administrations waged the Cold War through American dollars. Given Congress' power of the purse, the legislature could not be bypassed on foreign aid matters. In 1963, a coalition of liberal senators concerned with U.S. support for dictatorial regimes and conservative House members who saw the program as a waste of taxpayers' money combined in what one magazine termed the "foreign aid revolt." Congress reduced the administration's foreign aid request by nearly a third, and imposed a variety of policy amendments limiting presidential freedom of action overseas. After a couple of quiet years, the coalition came back together in 1966, and with Johnson's unpopularity growing after huge losses in the 1966 midterm elections, the administration recognized that Congress would attack the foreign aid program even more aggressively in 1967.⁶³

In this environment, the State and Defense Departments saw no reason to spare Israel; both recommended a reduction in U.S. aid to Eshkol's government. But even though almost all countries saw a dropoff in assistance, Israeli leaders expressed alarm at the cut. In early March, Abe Feinberg met with Rostow to report "a strong feeling in Israel that we are shifting our policy away from them."⁶⁴ A week later, the informal envoy met with Johnson, but found the President initially unresponsive: Johnson pointed to the aftereffects of the Samu raid (which, among other things, generated an emergency \$9 million aid package to Jordan, to compensate for Jordanian arms destroyed in the attack) and continued Israeli recalcitrance about a full U.S. inspection of the Dimona facility.⁶⁵

⁶³ Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁴ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, March 15, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 395.

⁶⁵ "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, March 17, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 397.

On second thought, Johnson decided to take another look at the Israeli aid total.⁶⁶ Both the State and Defense Departments, however, continued to oppose to a more generous package. Robert McNamara counseled that not only should the United States reject Israel's request for 200 armored personnel carriers (APCs), but that "it would be a serious mistake" to provide Israel with *any* APCs. In his opinion, which the Joint Chiefs of Staff shared, "the present and prospective military balance in the Middle East strongly favors Israel"; indeed, "Israel will be militarily unchallengeable by any combination of Arab states at least during the next five years."⁶⁷ The State Department, meanwhile, expressed "concern over too close a military relationship while Israel's nuclear intentions are in doubt."⁶⁸ Nor was it willing to provide symbolic support: the Department successfully pressed the President to order U.S. diplomats to join other Western nations in boycotting Israel's 1967 Independence Day parade—which, since it was held in West Jerusalem, had generated protests from Arab nations, including Jordan.⁶⁹

These responses reflected the assumptions of U.S. intelligence analysts, who dismissed as overblown Eshkol's warnings about Arab intentions. An April 13, 1967 National Intelligence Estimate conceded that the "Arabs and Israelis are no closer to a solution of their fundamental differences than they ever were," and understood that the Soviets would aggressively seek to exploit Arab-Israeli tensions. That said, the NIE denied that the Soviets wanted to see "armed conflict" in the region. The conclusion: "Although periods of increased tension in the Arab-Israeli dispute will occur from time to time, both sides appear to appreciate that large-scale military action involves considerable risk and no assurance of leading to a solution. In any event, the chances are good that the threat of great power intervention will prevent an attempt by either side to resolve the problem by military force."⁷⁰

Johnson rarely overruled his senior advisors directly, at least if a less confrontational option existed. In 1965, the President used the presence of Eddie Weisl and Abe Feinberg to help prevent Bundy, Rusk, and Ball from

⁶⁶ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, April 7, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 401.

⁶⁷ "Memorandum from Secretary of Defense McNamara to President Johnson, Washington, April 17, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 405.

⁶⁸ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, April 18, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 406.

⁶⁹ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, April 29, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 413.

⁷⁰ "National Intelligence Estimate, NIE 30-67, April 13, 1967," FRUS, vol. 18, document 404.

reconsidering the decision to supply Israel with tanks. In 1967, the President turned to Arthur Goldberg to implement his “desire to do everything we can to help the Israelis.”⁷¹ Rather than rejecting outright McNamara’s proposal, Johnson provided the Defense Secretary’s recommendations to Goldberg—fully expecting the UN ambassador to oppose them. Goldberg fulfilled his role, terming McNamara’s position “unnecessarily harsh on Israel,” and urging a compromise of the United States selling 100 APC’s to Israel.⁷² At a May 23 lunch meeting with Rusk, McNamara, Rostow, and DCI Richard Helms, the President indicated that he had accepted Goldberg’s idea. The United States also provided Israel with sales and credit grants of Hawk and tank spare parts.⁷³

By this point, the situation in the Middle East had taken a sudden turn for the worse. On May 16, the Egyptian government suddenly moved more than 75,000 troops into the Sinai, and demanded the withdrawal of the UN Emergency Force (UNEF), which had been stationed in the Sinai since 1957. The UNEF had served as a buffer between Egypt and Israel; the withdrawal demand was seen as the first step toward a possible Egyptian military strike. The UNEF commander and perhaps Nasser as well expected U Thant to treat the demand as the first step in a prolonged negotiation process. Instead, the UN Secretary General almost immediately complied with Nasser’s request, without even taking the matter to the Security Council.⁷⁴

Nasser’s initiative convinced high-level U.S. policymakers that they might have underestimated the seriousness of the Middle Eastern peril. Acting on the joint recommendation of Rusk, Rostow, and Goldberg, Johnson sent an urgent message to Eshkol, counseling patience.⁷⁵ In the letter, Johnson said that he understood how Eshkol and Israeli citizens “are having your patience tried to the limits by continuing incidents along your border.” Nonetheless, Johnson emphasized “in the strongest terms the need to avoid any action on your side which would add further to the violence and tension in your area.” Then, making it clear his intentions about preemptive Israeli action, Johnson added that he would not “accept any responsibilities on behalf of the United States for

⁷¹ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, May 8, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 416.

⁷² “Memorandum from the Representative to the United Nations (Goldberg) to President Johnson, New York, May 1, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 18, document 414.

⁷³ National Security File, Country File, Israel, Israeli Aid, 5/67, Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library, Austin, Texas.

⁷⁴ Oren, *Six Days of War*, pp. 67-75.

⁷⁵ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, May 17, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 7.

situations which arise as the result of actions on which we are not consulted.”⁷⁶

Less than three weeks would pass between Nasser’s demand to UNEF and the start of the Six-Day War. All the while, the United States continued to urge restraint upon Israel, and encouraged Arab states to do likewise on Syria and Egypt.⁷⁷ The administration also pressed the Soviets to use their influence with Nasser, but Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko demurred, stating that his government “had reached the conclusion that the reason for the current tension was the policy of Israel, and certain circles or groups in Israel which had determined this policy.”⁷⁸ Encountering a more favorable international response, administration officials coordinated policy with British prime minister Harold Wilson, whose government generally sympathized with both U.S. and Israeli interests in the Middle East.⁷⁹ (Johnson did not work as closely with France; U.S.-French relations had cooled after President Charles DeGaulle withdrew the country from NATO and expelled U.S. troops from French soil in 1966.) Privately, U.S. advisors understood that “our commitment is (a) to prevent Israel from being destroyed and (b) to stop aggression—either through the UN or on our own.”⁸⁰ But Johnson, despite pleadings from Eshkol, refused to issue such a statement publicly.

The crisis escalated further on April 23, when Nasser—in violation of the 1957 cease-fire agreement that ended the British/French/Israeli occupation of the Sinai—closed the Straits of Tiran, which controlled access to the Gulf of Aqaba and Israel’s southern port, Eilat. In public remarks, Johnson announced that the “Government of the United States is deeply concerned, in particular, with three potentially explosive aspects of the present confrontation”: the failure of the armistice agreements that ended the 1948 and 1956 conflicts to hold; the “hurried withdrawal” of the UNEF from Gaza and the Sinai; and “the recent build-up of military forces.” The closing of the Gulf of Aqaba to Israeli shipping, added the President, “has brought a new and very grave dimension to the crisis, since “the right of free and innocent passage of the international waterway is a

⁷⁶ “Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, May 17, 1967, 7pm,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 8.

⁷⁷ “Telegram from the Embassy in Israel to the Department of State, Tel Aviv, May 23, 1967, 2145Z,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 50.

⁷⁸ “Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, Moscow, May 23, 1967, 1310Z,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 41.

⁷⁹ “Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, May 24, 1967, 11-11:40am,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 53.

⁸⁰ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, May 19, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 20.

vital interest of the entire international community.”⁸¹

At an NSC meeting the next day, Rusk described the Arab-Israeli situation “as serious but not yet desperate.” Even though U Thant had been widely derided for seeming to appease Nasser, Rusk still held out hope for UN mediation. Moreover, despite Gromyko’s hard line and a rash of intemperate public statements from Moscow, the State Department privately saw “the Russians playing a generally moderate game,” by offering “somewhat less than complete” support to Syria and Egypt. Tensions with Congress over Vietnam and military aid remained, but Rusk also discovered strong legislative support for the President; the Foreign Relations Committee unanimously backed the administration’s attempts to avoid unilateral U.S. actions. And the Israeli government seemed willing to give diplomacy a chance, sending Abba Eban to France, Britain, and the United States for consultations. In general, Rusk believed that while a settlement might not be on the immediate horizon, no government wanted war.⁸²

Johnson was less optimistic. He agreed with his advisors that the United States should exhaust multilateral options, including the UN, but held out little hopes for success: “I’ve never relied on it to save me when I’m going down.” He said that he would consider U.S. participation in a multilateral force to uphold maritime rights in the Red Sea—but noted, “I want to see Wilson and De Gaulle out there with their ships all lined up too.” The President also speculated about a Cold War angle to explain events, asking JCS representatives “whether or not the Soviets had staged this Middle East crisis” to divert U.S. attention from Vietnam. JCS chairman Earle Wheeler assured him that no evidence existed for such a theory.⁸³

Eban’s diplomatic tour, meanwhile, produced at best mixed results. In an evening meeting on May 25, Rusk bluntly informed Eban and Ambassador Harman that “the information available to us does not really support the belief that an attack by the UAR and Syria is imminent”; indeed, the State Department had concluded that an Egyptian attack would “be irrational” as long as U Thant’s mediation efforts remained alive. Rusk parried Eban’s request for a public statement of support by citing the President’s inability to act without congressional authorization. (At a time when the Johnson administration was under strong criticism for committing U.S. troops to South Vietnam without

⁸¹ *New York Times*, 24 April 1967.

⁸² “Memorandum for the Record, Washington, May 24, 1967, 12:35-1:25pm,” *FRUS*, vol. 19, document 54.

⁸³ “Memorandum for the Record, Washington, May 24, 1967, 12:35-1:25pm,” *FRUS*, vol. 19, document 54.

a declaration of war, Rusk's reverence for the warmaking power was ironic.) Finally, the Secretary told Eban that Johnson wanted it "particularly emphasized that preemptive action by Israel would cause extreme difficulty for the United States."⁸⁴

The next morning, Eban met with Robert McNamara, who was similarly discouraging. The Defense Secretary stated that the Eshkol government needed to "realize that an Israeli attack under present circumstances would have most serious consequences." Indeed, continued McNamara, the United States "cannot undertake to support Israel if Israel launches an attack."⁸⁵ Johnson concluded the visit by telling the Foreign Minister that even though he could offer no commitment without first going to Congress, "Israel need not be alone unless it chooses to go alone."⁸⁶

Eban then returned to Israel for an emergency cabinet meeting—only to be greeted by a *New York Times* story suggesting (inaccurately, as it turned out) that the administration might further distance itself from Tel Aviv, by entertaining a compromise solution to open the Gulf of Aqaba to all non-Israeli ships.⁸⁷

As late as June 4, most U.S. policymakers continued to assume that they had at least ten days to broker a settlement; the administration considered the possibility of sending Vice President Hubert Humphrey to Cairo.⁸⁸ Former Eisenhower Treasury Secretary Robert Anderson—a close friend of Johnson's who had extensive contacts with leading oil companies—met privately with Nasser in early June. The discussions resolved nothing, but Nasser promised to send a high-ranking official to the United States for further talks. Anderson portrayed the Egyptian leader as open to compromise, believing that "if U Thant had not acted so precipitously [in ordering the UNEF force to withdraw] and had at least referred the matter to the Security Council in order to gain time the whole issue of the Strait might not have arisen."⁸⁹

On June 4, Walt Rostow penned a long memorandum to the President

84 "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, May 25, 1967, 8:30pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 64.

85 "Memorandum of Conversation, I-35592/67, Washington, May 26, 1967, 10:30am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 69.

86 Robert Dallek, *Flawed Giant: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1961-1973*, Vol. 2 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), p. 427

87 *New York Times*, 30 May 1967.

88 The exception, ironically, appears to have been the President, who told an aide in early June, "They're going to hit. There's nothing we can do about it." Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 427.

89 "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, June 16, 1967, 3:05-3:55pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 301.

summarizing U.S. expectations in the area. "It is now increasingly clear," he wrote, "that the Israelis will wait only about a week to take on themselves the forcing of the blockade at the Gulf of Aqaba. They clearly envisage forcing Nasser to fire the first shot; they will respond on a limited basis in Sinai but be prepared to fight a war against all the Arab forces arrayed against them without external assistance in manpower or other direct application of foreign military force." Nonetheless, some reasons for optimism existed. Politically, the "radical nationalism represented by Nasser, while powerful at the moment in the wake of his breakthrough against U Thant, is waning; Arab socialism and other such doctrines have not proved successful; the moderates of the region (Turkey, Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon) have done better than Egypt, Syria, and Iraq." As a result, "we are dealing with Nasser not on a rising trend but in somewhat the same as Khrushchev in the Cuba missile crisis; Nasser is trying to achieve a quick fix against an underlying waning position." A long-term solution to the region's difficulties—based on economic development, regional cooperation, and acceptance of Israel—remained possible. "But all this depends on Nasser's being cut down to size."⁹⁰

Accordingly, Rostow recommended that the United States "urgently make it clear to Nasser—which has not yet been made clear—that we intend to honor our 1957 commitments" to uphold the maritime neutrality of the Gulf of Aqaba and the Suez Canal. The United States similarly needed to demonstrate "a willingness to move forward with other critical issues in the area where progress is required, if, indeed, the region is to settle down and move towards peace and stability, including: the placement of UN observers on both sides of the borders; Arab refugees; regional economic development; water; and the damping down of the arms race." If, after a few days' time, Nasser refused to budge, the administration should request from Congress authorization to militarily escort ships entering the Gulf of Aqaba. Finally, U.S. diplomats could continue working behind the scenes to find a comprehensive solution, which would include refugee resettlement and regional economic development. Such a course, Rostow predicted, would provide the Soviets with an opening to avoid full-out support for Nasser.⁹¹

Rostow told Johnson that the United States could have as long as two weeks to implement this policy. In fact, it did not have 24 hours.

⁹⁰ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, June 4, 1967, 11:30am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 144.

⁹¹ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, June 4, 1967, 11:30am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 144.

Three: U.S. Diplomacy and the Six-Day War

Walt Rostow was first informed that hostilities in the Middle east had erupted at 2.50am, Washington, DC time. He dressed and headed for the White House, arriving at around 3.20am. He quickly called Dean Rusk, who already had learned of events; both decided they would wait to alert the President for perhaps an hour, so they could have more information to provide.⁹² Rostow provided a short briefing to the President at 4.35am, and Rusk phoned Johnson shortly thereafter to discuss wording of a message for delivery to the Soviets.

President Johnson and Dean Rusk, 5.09am, 5 June 1967⁹³

Dean Rusk: A flash message at this point I'd suggest would read as follows:

"Dismayed by preliminary reports of heavy fighting between Israeli and Egyptian forces. As you know, we have been making the maximum effort to prevent this situation. We are expecting a very high-level Egyptian delegation on Wednesday, and we had assurances from the Israelis that they would not initiate hostilities pending further diplomatic efforts.

"We feel that it is very important that the United Nations Security Council succeed in bringing this fighting to an end as quickly as possible, and are ready to cooperate with all members of the Council to that end."

Now, we've been talking about it in these terms. It is probably better for us to get some sort of a message of this sort [out] before the question of who really was responsible is completely clarified. To let them [the Soviets] know that we were not a party to any of this business at this stage.

But I wanted to check, get your own reaction—

President Johnson: Yes. Yes, I would.

Rusk: All right.

President Johnson: Yeah.

⁹² "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, November 17, 1968," FRUS, vol. 19, document 149.

⁹³ President Johnson and Dean Rusk (excerpt), 5.09am, 5 June 1967, Tape WH6706.01, Citation #11901, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Six.

Rusk: All right.

President Johnson: Sure would. So, what—what does it appear to you? Does it appear to you reasonably sure that these [Egyptian] tanks kicked it?

Rusk: Well, the fact that the fighting has been occurring initially over Egypt is a little hard to sort out. [*Two seconds excised material for national security purposes.*] It's possible. But I'd put more weight on the Israeli claim that they had a large number of Egyptian aircraft headed for Israel, from the sea. But I think it's just a little too early yet.

My instincts tell me that the Israelis probably kicked this off. But I just don't know yet, and I don't think we ought to make a preliminary judgment on that, because it's just hard to say.

President Johnson: Do they say to us that the Egyptians kicked it off?

Rusk: Well, they're both publicly—we have nothing, no message yet from the Israeli government, except that they've asked for a meeting of the [UN] Security Council. We've had no direct message from Eshkol, or [Abba] Eban, or anybody.

Both [countries] publicly are claiming that the other started it. But the Israeli claim that a big tank column was moving toward Israel and that they went out to meet it—again, looks just a little thin on the surface. [*Two seconds excised material for national security purposes.*]

Meanwhile, we've asked Harlan Cleveland, who's now in a meeting of NATO that was called to talk about this situation to keep a group of the permanent members on a standby to be consulting throughout the day, to be available for consultation. And, of course, the Security Council will be meeting.

The Security Council will probably call on both sides for an immediate cease-fire. It would be usual and typical for them to do that. But we just don't know what effect that will have.

My guess is the Israelis kicked this off.

The President soon obtained a more comprehensive summary of events from Walt Rostow. Johnson's immediate concern seemed in part public relations. Recalling Kennedy's successful handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis, the President seemed eager to recreate a Middle East version of the ExComm, the ad hoc committee of the National Security Council that Kennedy had formed in October 1962.

There were two important differences, however, between Cuba in 1962 and the Sinai in 1967. First, news of the Cuban missile sites remained secret for several days, allowing Kennedy and his advisors to consider a full range of alternatives free from public pressure. That option, obviously, was not open to Johnson in 1967. Second, Kennedy was comfortable having detailed discussions of international questions, and knew most of the key players. As this conversation with Rostow revealed, neither condition applied to Johnson.

President Johnson and Walt Rostow, 5 June 1967, 6.15am⁹⁴

President Johnson: What would you think today about having the leadership informed up at the Congress? Have McNamara and Rusk go up there instead of coming down here. I think it blows it up and makes it a little critical when they're down here.

We might ask some of our good friends that might be helpful to come in from the outside and give us some help here.

Walt Rostow: Clark [Clifford], Abe [Fortas]—people like that?

President Johnson: Well, I would think . . . I'm not sure, but I would think that we ought to, just for public appearance's sake, maybe ask [Dean] Acheson to come by.

Rostow: All right.

President Johnson: You ought to ask Rusk and McNamara what they think of it, just on your own, without it coming from me.

Rostow: I understand.

President Johnson: But these would be the ones that I would like to talk to about these things, and see what

⁹⁴ *President Johnson and Walt Rostow (excerpt), 6.15am, 5 June 1967, Tape WH6706.01, Citation #11902, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Seven.*

preparations they think we ought to make, and so forth: Acheson, [George] Ball, Clifford . . .

Rostow: Want Mac Bundy down?

President Johnson: Yes, Bundy would be good. [*Pauses.*] I always liked that old man [John] McCloy and that other fellow that always handled Pakistan and India. I thought his judgment's good. Sometime we ought to have him in here. He handled the test ban, a lot of that stuff.

Rostow: Dean?

President Johnson: Yeah, Arthur Dean.

Rostow: Arthur Dean.

President Johnson: But I wouldn't mention McCloy and Dean today.

Rostow: All right.

President Johnson: But I do think that Bundy would be exceptional—just get on the shuttle [from New York City] and come down here.

And I think that beyond that you ought to ask them—I'd do that anyway, I'd just call him and tell him I'd like to visit with him about this letter. I think that's very good. I want to talk to him about this other matter, too, and I wished he'd come down here and be prepared to stay as long as he can.

Rostow: I will do that, sir, and—

President Johnson: And then I'd check them on the Leadership—whether they think it wouldn't be a proper thing to ask [Mike] Mansfield, or arrange through . . .

Where's the Vice President [Hubert Humphrey]?

Rostow: I don't know where the Vice President—

President Johnson: Find out from—see if they could have meetings like they had the other day [on Vietnam]. Just handle them the same way.

Rostow: Now, on that one, I think you'd want to get Dick Helms in, on the intelligence side. Would you—

President Johnson: Yes, yes.

Rostow: I should think you'd want him, and Rusk and McNamara up there.

President Johnson: Yeah, yeah.

Rostow: All right. I'll try it out—the list except Mac—I'll just get Mac down here. And I'll try out

this Leadership idea, and I'll try out the names on my own.

President Johnson: Good.

Rostow: All right, sir.

In the chaos surrounding the outbreak of hostilities, inevitable difficulties ensued. Johnson immediately ordered his advisors to look “carefully at the matter of what we say to the press at this point.” Unfortunately, the word did not reach State Department spokesman Robert McCloskey. When asked by a reporter if the administration intended to reaffirm a position of neutrality, McCloskey replied, “Indeed, I would: I would be more than happy to. We have tried to steer an even-handed course through this. Our position is neutral in thought, word, and deed.”⁹⁵ Special Assistant to the President Joseph Califano fretted that McCloskey’s remarks were “killing us with the Jews in this country.”⁹⁶ Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen (R-Illinois) ridiculed the remark, asking “What’s neutral? I call it ‘snootral’—when you stick up your snoot at both sides.”⁹⁷

Nor did the updated ExComm idea work as Johnson had hoped. As ordered, Rostow invited Acheson, Ball, and Clifford to Washington. Yet a sense of collegiality was lacking. “There was an interesting moment,” Rostow dryly recalled, when “Mr. Acheson looked back on the whole history of Israeli independence and, in effect, said that it was a mistake to ever create the State of Israel. Mr. Clifford, of course, had been deeply involved in the early US recognition of Israel.”⁹⁸

If the ExComm model never got off the ground, and the President’s desire to appoint a “Mr. Oil” to focus on oil supply issues was quietly shelved, the Johnson/Rostow decision to bring in Bundy worked well.⁹⁹ Johnson, Rostow recalled, “wanted to make sure that his staff was fully capable of handling two wars at one time.” With Rostow himself focused on Vietnam, Bundy coordinated the administration’s response to Middle Eastern matters.

⁹⁵ *New York Times*, 6 June 1967.

⁹⁶ *Department of State Bulletin*, 26 June 1967, pages 949-50.

⁹⁷ *New York Times*, 7 June 1967.

⁹⁸ “Memorandum for the Record, Washington, November 17, 1968,” FRUS, vol. 20, document 149.

⁹⁹ “Memorandum Prepared by the Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs (Battle), Washington, June 5, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 163.

The course of the Six Day War has been covered elsewhere in detail.¹⁰⁰ An initial strike by the Israeli fighter planes all but neutralized the Egyptian Air Force, while a ground attack launched a few hours later moved deep into the Sinai. A disastrous decision by King Hussein to enter the war on Egypt's side led to the swift destruction of the Jordanian Air Force; when Hussein rejected a June 5 Israeli cease-fire offer, IDF troops moved into the West Bank.

The initial U.S. response to the conflict focused on determining which side initiated hostilities and preventing the Soviets from exploiting the regional instability. In a June 5 memorandum, Walt Rostow spelled out what the United States hoped to accomplish in engaging the Soviet Union. "Our behind-the-scenes work with the Russians," he reasoned, "should consist not merely in negotiating a cease-fire; because a cease-fire will not answer the fundamental questions in the minds of the Israelis until they have acquired so much real estate and destroyed so many Egyptian planes and tanks that they are absolutely sure of their bargaining position." The United States, therefore, should sound out the Soviets "about the terms of a settlement," to include "Eilat open to oil; observers on both sides of the line; a Soviet commitment to work with us to damp down the arms race; a turn in the road on refugees; [and] a Middle East development bank that would bring the Iranians and Turks into the diplomacy of the area." With an excessive optimism that would characterize for several months U.S. policymakers' views about the prospects of long-term peace, Rostow hoped that "so long as the war is roughly moving in Israeli's favor, I believe we can shorten it by getting at the substance of a settlement at the earliest possible time."¹⁰¹

In the early hours of fighting, however, the Soviets showed few signs of cooperation. Diplomatically, the Soviets pushed for an immediate cease-fire, coupled by an Israeli withdrawal to prewar positions.¹⁰² Seeking to give sufficient time for what he believed would be an Arab triumph, Nikolai Federenko, the Soviet Union's ambassador to the UN, spurned requests from Goldberg to meet and discuss a cease-fire.¹⁰³ (The Security Council passed a cease-fire resolution

¹⁰⁰ Oren, *Six Days of War*; Michael Bar-Zohar, *Embassies in Crisis: Diplomats and Demagogues Behind the Six Day War* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1970); J. Robert Moskin, *Among Lions: The Battle for Jerusalem, June 5-7, 1967* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1982); Samir Mutawi, *Jordan in the 1967 War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988); Richard Parker, *The Six Day War* (Jacksonville: University of Florida Press, 1997).

¹⁰¹ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, June 5, 1967, 5:45pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 166.

¹⁰² "Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, June 6, 1967, 6:07pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 182.

¹⁰³ Oren, *Six Days of War*, p. 199.

the next day, June 6.) Soviet propaganda also passed along Nasser's false claims that British and U.S. planes had assisted the Israeli attack. In a sharply worded June 6 letter to Kosygin, Johnson described himself as "puzzled . . . by what has been said by the Soviet Press and Radio . . . It does not help to charge the United States as a participant in aggression, especially when our only role has been to press for restraint at every step of the way."¹⁰⁴

Johnson later vented his frustration on the matter to Arkansas senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee.

President Johnson and J. William Fulbright, 10.57pm, 19 June 1967¹⁰⁵

President Johnson: I think his [Soviet premier Alexsey Kosygin's] information about America's conduct in the Arab world is as faulty and inaccurate as his intelligence is on Nasser's capabilities.

J. William Fulbright: I think he must have known that. What I meant is, he misrepresented it!

President Johnson: Oh, yes. But he didn't know it.

He wouldn't buy their [the Arabs'] statement that our planes participated in bombing the Arab world. He wouldn't take that one.

By he did buy this stuff that we were there inciting them. And there's no man in the world that did as much and got condemned as much, by everybody from Eshkol on down, as I did—

Fulbright: Yeah.

President Johnson: —for not inciting them. I told them [the Israelis], I said, "You will not need to go alone unless you do go alone. And we will take our time, and we will find some way to open the Straits [of Tiran]."

"But if you get out here, and cut loose, and act irresponsibly, why, you'll develop a lot of sentiment in this country—anti-semitism, and every other damn thing. We just think it would be highly irresponsible."

And we got them to put it off. They held it off for a week—told us they'd hold it off for another week!

¹⁰⁴ "Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin, Washington, June 6, 1967, 10:21am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 175.

¹⁰⁵ President Johnson and J. William Fulbright (excerpt), 10.57pm, 19 June 1967, Tape WH6706.01, Citation #11908, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Eight.

But then when Nasser said he was going to wipe them out, and he moved this stuff up there, and Russia passed on the message that he [Eshkol] was going to attack Syria, why, they couldn't hold it anymore, and they had to jump.

Despite Johnson's bitterness over Soviet and Arab propaganda attacks, as the war turned decisively in Israel's favor, the sharp tone increasingly came not from the United States but from the Soviet Union. In a June 7 missive, Kosygin accused Israel of "ignoring the Resolution of the Security Council, summoning all governments concerned to take as a first step all measures towards an immediate cease-fire and cessation of all military actions in this area. Such a situation calls for the Security Council to use its authority to guarantee the implementation of its own decision."¹⁰⁶ The next day, a Kosygin letter branded Israel "the aggressor, who has challenged the Security Council and all peace-loving states," and warned that "re-establishment of peace in the Near East cannot be ensured" until Israeli forces returned to their prewar positions.¹⁰⁷

Johnson and his key advisors devoted a June 7 NSC meeting to determining the Soviets' intent and gloating over their rival's apparent setback in the region. The Soviets, according to Rusk, "seemed to have been guilty of encouraging" Nasser in his "stunning loss." DCI Helms reasoned "that the Russians had badly miscalculated, even more so than in the Cuban missile crisis." Tommy Thompson, the former U.S. ambassador to Moscow, "could figure out no explanation for the Soviet misjudgment." Given this outcome, Thompson predicted that "the end of belligerence should be relatively easy to handle with the USSR."¹⁰⁸

The intelligence community offered a much more sanguine judgment. A June 9 analysis concluded that the Soviets did not want war but had, nonetheless, taken a number of steps (such as privately passing along dubious intelligence to both Egypt and Syria about planned Israel attacks) that made a conflict more likely. "Clearly they miscalculated the course of events," the analysis noted, but this failure did not mean that Moscow would lose ground permanently. "The Soviets still have impressive advantages in the area, the principal ones being the

¹⁰⁶ "Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, June 7, 1967, 8:18am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 188.

¹⁰⁷ "Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, June 8, 1967, 9:48am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 209.

¹⁰⁸ "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, June 7, 1967, 12:05-1pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 194.

high tide of anti-US and anti-Israeli feeling, and the Arab belief that the USSR is the only major power likely to provide support for them in the foreseeable future." And whatever setbacks Kosygin's regime had encountered by not providing unconditional support to the Arabs, "We do not foresee a period of active Soviet cooperation with the US in the Middle East. Soviet willingness to act in at least partial concert with the US on the question of an immediate and unconditional ceasefire was born of the needs of the moment and did not, we think, reflect long-term considerations (other than the standard Soviet desire to avoid direct confrontation with the US). Basic US and Soviet goals in the Middle East--including, for example, the USSR's wish to increase its presence in the area and the US desire to prevent this--have not been altered by the current crisis."¹⁰⁹

Johnson's interpretation of the Soviet position more closely mirrored that of the intelligence community than his advisors. He told confidantes that he "was not sure we were out of our troubles." He, for one, "could not visualize the USSR saying it had miscalculated, and then walking away."¹¹⁰

The longer the war lasted, the more aggressive Soviet diplomacy became. On June 7, Jordan accepted a cease-fire with Israel, and IDF forces turned their attention to the North. Two days later, Israeli ground forces moved into the Golan Heights, responding to Syrian air and artillery attacks. The outbreak of fighting between Israel and Syria only intensified the Soviet pressure. Rusk, terming the news "deeply disturbing," believed that the move both "cast doubts on Israeli intentions" and created the "gravest problems" for the U.S. position in Arab countries. "We must at all costs have," he told Ambassador Barbour, "complete cessation [of] Israeli military action except in cases where clearly some replying fire is necessary in self-defense."¹¹¹ When the Israeli government ignored the warning, Rusk passed word to Foreign Minister Eban "that the position of Israel at the UN is deteriorating rapidly because of a general impression that Israel is not throwing itself fully behind the effort of the Security Council to obtain a cease fire." The United States, the Secretary reminded his Israeli counterpart, was "fully in support of the Security Council resolutions. We consider it very important that Israel demonstrate by actions on the ground that its announcement about the orders it has issued means what it

¹⁰⁹ "Memorandum from the Acting Chairman of the Central Intelligence Agency's Board of National Estimates (Smith) to Director of Central Intelligence Helms," *Washington, June 9, 1967*, *FRUS*, vol. 19, document 240.

¹¹⁰ "Memorandum for the Record, *Washington, June 7, 1967, 12:05-1pm*," *FRUS*, vol. 19, document 194.

¹¹¹ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, *Washington, June 8, 1967, 6:31am*," *FRUS*, vol. 19, document 203.

says." Unless Israel agreed to a cease-fire on the Syrian front, Rusk predicted "broad support in the Security Council"—presumably including the United States—"for condemnation of Israel."¹¹²

But Israel again ignored U.S. pleas. With Israeli troops still advancing into Syria, to the point of threatening Damascus, the conflict's only U.S.-Soviet crisis ensued.

After the Cuban Missile Crisis, the U.S. and Soviet governments established the Hotline, a direct communication system between Washington and Moscow designed to allow for full and frank exchanges between the superpowers in event of an international crisis. Just before 8am on the morning of June 10, the President, Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach (who was simultaneously pressing Israeli diplomats to accept an immediate cease fire), Robert McNamara, Clark Clifford, McGeorge Bundy, Walt Rostow, Tommy Thompson and DCI Richard Helms were in the Situation Room as a message from Kosygin arrived. (The exchanges had their awkward moments. The Soviets repeatedly demanded proof of Johnson's presence in the room before beginning the transmission; Johnson's first reply was addressed to "Comrade Kosygin," which the President had been assured was proper protocol but which was considered mocking by some in the Soviet leadership.) Thompson recalled the atmosphere as "a time of great concern and utmost gravity."¹¹³ Helms remembered that "conversation during the first couple of hours was in the lowest voices he had ever heard in a meeting of that kind."¹¹⁴

Kosygin's message could hardly have been more alarming. In a thinly veiled threat, the Soviet premier stated, "A very crucial moment has now arrived which forces us, if military actions are not stopped in the next few hours, to adopt an independent decision. We are ready to do this. However, these actions may bring us into a clash, which will lead to a grave catastrophe. Obviously in the world there are powers to whom this would be advantageous. We propose that you demand from Israel that it unconditionally cease military action in the next few hours. On our part, we will do the same. We purpose to warn Israel that, if this is not fulfilled, necessary actions will be taken, including military."¹¹⁵

¹¹² "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, June 9, 1967, 9:32pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 239.

¹¹³ "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, November 4, 1968," FRUS, vol. 19, document 245.

¹¹⁴ "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, October 22, 1968, "SUBJECT: Hot Line Meeting June 10, 1967," FRUS, vol. 19, document 244.

¹¹⁵ "Message from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, June 10, 1967, 8:48am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 243.



The Hotline teletype machine, as the President talked to Secretary of State Dean Rusk, with Robert McNamara looking on in a meeting about the Six Day War. As Kosygin's message arrived, one participant recalled the atmosphere as "a time of great concern and utmost gravity." [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

Kosygin's bluntness so stunned Thompson that the ambassador assumed that the letter might have been translated improperly. But after checking the Russian text, he confirmed the Soviet threat of a "military" reaction. In response, McNamara asked Helms and Thompson whether he should recommend returning the Sixth Fleet to the eastern Mediterranean. Both urged him to do so; and the President accepted the recommendation.¹¹⁶

Fighting on the Syrian front ended before any further diplomatic escalation between Washington and Moscow occurred. Under heavy pressure from the United States, the Israelis agreed to a cease fire, though delayed for as long as possible into the afternoon of June 10, to maximize their advance into Syria. The end of fighting also brought a rupture in Israeli-Soviet diplomatic ties, as the Soviets broke relations with Eshkol's government.

¹¹⁶ "Memorandum for the Record, Washington, October 22, 1968, "SUBJECT: Hot Line Meeting June 10, 1967," FRUS, vol. 19, document 244.

Four: LBJ and Postwar Diplomacy

In autumn 1967, Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow noted that U.S. policymakers perceived regional events “as a prolonged ‘Cuban missile crisis’ with the Soviet Union, not primarily an Arab-Israeli affair.”¹¹⁷ From the start of the conflict, a Cold War angle overlaid U.S. policy toward the Middle East.¹¹⁸ In addition, for the next several months, U.S. policy toward the region would be guided by three other issues: the fate of moderate Arab states; Johnson’s standing in Congress; and the nature of a UN solution.

In the end, while the United States succeeded in eventually pushing through an acceptable UN resolution, Johnson struggled in addressing the other matters.

1. *The Cold War*

The end of the fighting initiated a lengthy diplomatic process between the United States and the USSR. Kosygin made the first move. On June 13, the Soviets, joined by several Eastern Bloc nations and Guinea, demanded that the UN convene a special session of the General Assembly. On the table would be a resolution condemning Israel for the war and calling on Israel to immediately withdraw from all occupied territories and pay compensation to Egypt, Jordan, and Syria.¹¹⁹ The Soviet premier also announced that he and Foreign Minister Gromyko would travel to New York, so he could address the General Assembly in person.

Kosygin’s move alarmed Johnson, who doubted “that anything useful can come from my personal participation in the General Assembly.”¹²⁰ Indeed, the President privately told network bureau chiefs, “Kosygin had suffered a fiasco worse than the Bay of Pigs, and was struggling to recover.”¹²¹ The British

¹¹⁷ “Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs (Rostow) to Secretary of State Rusk, Washington, September 18, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 441.

¹¹⁸ “Message from President Johnson to Premier Kosygin, Washington, June 5, 1967, 8:57am,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 159.

¹¹⁹ “Draft Resolution by the Soviet Union at the Emergency Session of the General Assembly, A/L. 519, 19 June 1967,” <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/Foreign%20Relations/Israels%20Foreign%20Relations%20since%201947/1947-1974/24%20Draft%20Resolution%20by%20the%20Soviet%20Union%20at%20the%20Eme>, accessed 2 March 2008.

¹²⁰ “Telegram from President Johnson to Prime Minister Wilson, Washington, June 16, 1967, 1959Z,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 302.

¹²¹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, p. 433.

ambassador in Washington, Sir Patrick Dean, seconded the President's analysis. In Dean's opinion, "Kosygin was up to no good in coming to New York. The Soviets were trying to make matters more difficult for the Western position in the area."¹²²

Kosygin appeared before the General Assembly on June 19. In a long and often bitter address, he denounced the U.S. position in Vietnam and the "militarists and revenge-seekers" in West Germany who "would like to follow in the footsteps of Hitlerites," before moving on to attack Israeli "crimes." The war, he claimed, resulted from "the mounting scale of attacks by Israeli troops against one or another of its neighbors," culminating in the "unprecedented perfidy" of the June 5 launch of hostilities. Kosygin asked his listeners to "recall the arrogance with which the unbridled aggressor ignored the demands of the Security Council for an immediate cease-fire." The time had come, he proclaimed, to speak out against "the ruling quarters in Israel," the people who had "conducted a policy of conquest and territorial expansion that cut into the lands of neighboring Arab states, evicting or even exterminating in the process the indigenous population of these areas." Kosygin urged his listeners to adopt a resolution condemning Israel and demanding an immediate Israeli withdrawal to the pre-June 5 borders.¹²³

When asked about the address by a Soviet diplomat, Undersecretary of State Eugene Rostow (who was, doubtless, used to Soviet propaganda) termed it "not too bad." He added that the State Department "thought two points in the speech were of particular importance: (1) Kosygin's assertion that Israel had the right to live; and (2) his comment that the leading powers had to find a common vocabulary."¹²⁴

Johnson responded to Kosygin's address by providing his vision of a comprehensive Middle East peace settlement. The President rejected calls for "a single, simple solution" of "an immediate return to the situation as it was on June 4." Such an approach was "not a prescription for peace but for renewed hostilities." Instead, Johnson outlined what he termed the "five great principles of peace in the region." Firmly addressing Israel's central concern, the President proclaimed that the first "and greatest principle" was every nation's

¹²² "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, June 15, 1967, 5:10pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 291.

¹²³ *New York Times*, 20 June 1967.

¹²⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, June 20, 1967, 1pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 309.

“fundamental right to live and to have this right respected by its neighbors.” Constant threats to national survival, Johnson stated, must end.¹²⁵

Johnson’s next three principles restated previous U.S. policies. Humanitarian concerns, the President affirmed, meant that all nations needed to support “justice for the refugees,” either by returning them “to their homes or find[ing] them other proper places to live and work.” Maritime rights needed to be preserved: “If a single act of folly was more responsible for this explosion than any other, I think it was the arbitrary and dangerous announced decision that the Strait of Tiran would be closed.” And nations outside the region needed to work to curb the Middle East arms race, since “scarce resources could be used much better for technical and economic development.”¹²⁶

For his fifth and final principle, Johnson stated that “the crisis underlines the importance of respect for political independence and territorial integrity of all the states of the area. We reaffirmed that principle at the height of this crisis. We reaffirm it again today on behalf of all. This principle can be effective in the Middle East only on the basis of peace between the parties. The nations of the region have had only fragile and violated truce lines for 20 years. What they now need are recognized boundaries and other arrangements that will give them security against terror, destruction, and war. Further, there just must be adequate recognition of the special interest of three great religions in the holy places of Jerusalem.”¹²⁷

Yuri Tcherniakov, counselor at the Soviet embassy in Washington, privately offered a moderate response to Johnson’s words. He urged the United States to encourage Israel “not to be too hard in their victory.” Eugene Rostow, with whom he met, pointed to Johnson’s remarks, commenting that the United States would oppose Israeli expansionism, but also that the administration “did not think, in view of what had happened during the last ten years, that it was practical or realistic to expect the Israelis to withdraw until there were assurances they would return to a condition of peace.” According to the notes of the meeting, Tcherniakov said he fully agreed, and added that the Arab doctrine of a right to destroy Israel was both “nonsense” and the source of a great deal of the “tragedy” in the area.¹²⁸

Both sides, then, seemed to have inched toward the common vocabulary that Kosygin claimed to desire. Yet Kosygin’s arrival in the United States also

¹²⁵ *New York Times*, 20 June 1967.

¹²⁶ *New York Times*, 20 June 1967.

¹²⁷ *New York Times*, 20 June 1967.

¹²⁸ “Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, June 20, 1967, 1pm,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 309.

created a personal problem for Johnson. The President never liked to meet foreign dignitaries, even under favorable circumstances, but both Tommy Thompson and Clark Clifford considered it "exceedingly important" that Johnson use Kosygin's visit to the UN as an "excuse" for a personal meeting with the Soviet premier. The President was far less enthusiastic. He informed his advisors that he was in "no hurry to gallop up there" to see Kosygin. The United States gained nothing but showing "too much eagerness."¹²⁹

The scheduling of a summit meeting became almost comical, as the President explained to Dwight Eisenhower.

President Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower, 25 June 1967¹³⁰

President Johnson: He [Kosygin] came over here in my judgment, the way I valued [evaluated?] it, to give Israel hell, and to try to give us hell, and to try to get some of this polecat off him. He smelled bad, sending them [the Arabs] all them arms, and just, by God, getting whipped in three days. And he wanted to divert the attention, and get us on the defensive, and give us hell.

We didn't engage him. We just kind of let him falter up there. He was pretty much flopping. He just started raising hell—every do-gooder in this country to have a conference. And I said, "Let's see what we do; I want to prepare for it. What are we going to talk about?"

They said everything from just a courtesy call, to just to meet with him, an exploratory conference. I finally—I had Rusk go up, and start out with [Soviet ambassador to the United States Anatoly] Dobrynin, and go to Gromyko, and then go to Kosygin himself, and say, "Now, we're ready to meet with you, but you come to Washington, or you go to Camp David."

Wouldn't go to Camp David, because [Nikita] Khrushchev had been there. [Eisenhower guffaws.] Wouldn't come to Washington because the Chinese and the Arabs would give him hell. And wanted me to come and sit down in

¹²⁹ "Notes of a Meeting of the NSC Special Committee, Washington, June 15, 1967, 6:30pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 294.

¹³⁰ *President Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower (excerpt)*, 9.44pm, 25 June 1967, Tape WH6706.02, Citations #11914-11916, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Nine.



Johnson and Kosygin, in private conversation at the Glassboro Summit. Kosygin, the President reported, "wouldn't give an inch" on the Middle East. [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

the United Nations.

I said, "I'm not going to do that." I just—by God, I'm not going to every time a man gets on a horse and gallops over here . . . He hadn't even told me he was here yet, officially. Never did tell me he was even coming.

Eventually, the two sides compromised. They agreed to meet in Glassboro, New Jersey, whose chief asset appeared to be its equidistant status from New York City and Washington, D.C. With classes having ended for the summer, Johnson also did not have to worry about the possibility of confronting students protesting the war in Vietnam.

The atmosphere at the three-day summit (June 23-June 25) was cordial as Johnson and Kosygin discussed arms control, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East. But the two sides achieved few concrete accomplishments.¹³¹

Just before 10pm on the summit's last night, Johnson called former President Eisenhower to brief him on events in Glassboro. Johnson spent part of the call (loudly) eating a late dinner, and most of the rest fuming about the Soviets' obstinacy, though the two men did share a laugh at the Arabs' poor military performance.

Glassboro concluded with the two sides' position clear, but no indication that the Soviets would be willing to work cooperatively with the United States on Middle Eastern matters.

President Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower, 9.44pm, 25 June 1967¹³²

President Johnson: [Kosygin was] pleasant. No vitriolic stuff; no antagonistic stuff; no bitter stuff. Two or three little low blows below the belt every now and then. When you'd meet him the same way, why, he would get back to a normal level.

He made clear they didn't want any confrontation with the United States, didn't want to fight us, didn't want to go to war. But on the Middle East, just one simple instruction—looked like he couldn't move one inch away from it on anything: there must be complete, absolute, immediate withdrawal of all troops, period. Nothing

¹³¹ Dallek, *Flawed Giant*, pp. 433-5.

¹³² *President Johnson and Dwight Eisenhower (excerpt)*, 9.44pm, 25 June 1967, Tape WH6706.02, Citations #11914-11916, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Ten.

else with it.

That that's going to be the [UN] resolution. They could pass that in the General Assembly; they wanted us to support it there. And in the Security Council. And nothing else. And that unless and until that's to be done, there's going to be a big and a great war, and those people will be fighting for ten years. That they would have to support the Arab nations.

That he couldn't understand why we'd want to support the Jews—three million people when there are a hundred million Arabs.

I told him that numbers do not determine what was right. We tried to do what was right regardless of the numbers, and we felt like that we'd have to take in maritime passage, that we'd have to consider where they were before they closed the Gulf [of Aqaba], and if they were going to go back to the Armistice Line. Were they going to have to go back to the Gulf of Aqaba, as it was?

He said, "Well, that would have to be done later. It would take two or three years to work out all these other things."

Wouldn't give an inch on that.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: I would say, in fairness, as a teacher, I would grade him about a B+ on discussions on arms—that is, offensive, defensive missiles, the ABM. He made one or two passes [that] I don't want to discuss with anyone but you.

But he said, "I want you to know that if you do not deliver Israel here on this [UN] resolution—[immediate] withdrawal—and you cannot pull these fighters back like you do two boxing men in the ring, separate the combatants, and you pull them back to where they were before this war started, then I want you to know there's going to be a big war, and there's going to be a great war, and it's coming soon."

And I said, "Well, now, Mr. Chairman, I hope that there's not going to—

And he said, "They'll fight with their fists and they'll

fight with arms."

And I said, "Now, if you're saying that the Israelis [sic] and the Arabs are going to have some further difficulties, I hope they don't. I'm going to do everything I can to keep them from fighting, and I hope you do everything you can to keep them from fighting. But if you're saying that it goes beyond that area, and others will be fighting, then you're speaking very serious business, and something that concerns me greatly. And I think it should concern you."

And he backed away from it, and said, "Well, I said that they would be fighting out there." And I said, "Well, I'll do all that I can to keep them from fighting; hope you do, too."

Dwight Eisenhower: Mm. Mr. President—

President Johnson: He made another pass this afternoon along the same line, and I met him the same way, and he backed off from it again.

[*Break.*]

Eisenhower: As I study this problem, there's two in the Mideast—two problems—that have got to be settled before there's ever going to be any, even a modus operandi there in the Mideast. One of them is water; and the other one is these refugees.

Now they can be tied up, it seems to me, if we could set up a scheme of—a cooperation, world cooperation, something like they started out with the Suez Canal or this atomic thing [get] in Vienna.

Suppose our government bought 51 percent of the stock, and then we built, in succession, three great big salt purification plants along the Levant, the eastern Mediterranean, and sell the stock to bankers all around the world, and so on, and make the water problem there—I mean, a water solution—make it so attractive, that both sides would almost be compelled by their people to take it. [*Johnson chomps on food and rattles utensils.*]

For example, I've been talking to some of these AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] people, scientific people. They say, without too expensive a thing, that we could put 500 million, up to a billion gallons a day, and



Johnson and Kosygin, in negotiations at the Glassboro Summit. Johnson graded his adversary: "As a teacher, I would grade him about a B+ on discussions on arms—that is, offensive, defensive missiles, the ABM." [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

water much of Israel, Jordan, Egypt east of the Suez, and some of Syria, probably.

Well, now, you see, we had that old Jordan River thing that you could do something about—

President Johnson: I broached that too him this afternoon—

Eisenhower: Did you?

President Johnson: I didn't get any comment. I told him that our people had talked to me about it just before the meeting.

Eisenhower: Yeah.

President Johnson: He [Kosygin] said, "Well, I just want to say this. I don't think we can talk about anything else until you get the troops withdrawn." He said, "We're referees in a fight, and you've got to get your man by the nape of the neck, and I got to get our man by the nape of the neck, and you've got to separate them and put them back in their corner." [*Eisenhower chuckles.*] He said, "Then we can talk about other things."

Eisenhower: Oh, well, about their man, though—they have to pick him up and revive him. [Both laugh.] That's the difference.

President Johnson: Well . . .

Glassboro concluded with the two sides' position clear, but no indication that the Soviets would be willing to work cooperatively with the United States on Middle Eastern matters.

II. Moderate Arab States

With the United States and the Soviet Union having outlined their positions publicly at the UN and privately at Glassboro, Johnson and his advisors turned their attention to the fate of sympathetic Arab states, such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait. Policy toward these nations revolved around the fifth of Johnson's five principles for peace—support for territorial integrity (with deliberate vagueness as to whether "territorial integrity" required a return to rewar boundaries) and "adequate recognition of the special interest of three great religions in the holy places of Jerusalem."

As had occurred before the war, Johnson looked to do what he could to prop

up King Hussein's regime in Jordan. Two days after the fighting ended, the President ordered the NSC to "find out what King Hussein wants." Johnson agreed that the Israelis were "really bitter" toward the King, but continued to see Hussein's regime as a vital outpost in the Cold War.¹³³ A few days later, at a private meeting with Foreign Minister Eban, Rusk encouraged the Israelis to develop greater economic coordination not just with the occupied West Bank but with Jordan as well. The Secretary said that he "realized Israelis were angry at Hussein but advised that they should not sell him short." (Eban would concede only that Israeli thinking was "less crystallized" regarding the West Bank than with Sinai or the Golan Heights, both of which the government hoped could be returned in land-for-peace deals.) Rusk cautioned his counterpart that an Israeli mishandling of the Jerusalem situation "could be a source of strong anti-Israel feeling in the United States," and that the Eshkol government needed to ensure the international community that it would provide free and open access to all religious sites in the city.¹³⁴

Jerusalem was also critical in the administration's effort to craft a diplomatic solution that would not further alienate key oil suppliers in the Gulf. A few days after fighting ended, Rostow informed the President that Saudi King Faisal had reiterated "his desire to continue your close personal relationship"—but that the King expected "us to be even-handed in picking up the pieces of the Mid-East war. He has no doubt that the Israelis committed aggression and asks you to help make sure that they don't gain territorially." The National Security Advisor reported receiving "strong pressures we are getting from our Arab friends to say that our support for the territorial integrity of all the states in the area means pulling the Israelis back behind the 1949 Armistice lines and not forcing a peace settlement."¹³⁵

Johnson confidante Bob Anderson, meanwhile, reported back that the oil companies believed that "the future of Jerusalem may be the critical and truly explosive problem in the Middle East. Arabs regard the Syrian Heights as a Syrian problem; the West Bank as a Jordanian problem; Gaza as an Egyptian problem; but the Old City of Jerusalem is capable of stirring the mobs in the streets to the point where the fate of our most moderate friends in the Middle East will be in jeopardy and the basis laid for a later holy war."

¹³³ "Notes of a Meeting of the Special Committee of the National Security Council, Washington, June 12, 1967, 6:30pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 269.

¹³⁴ "Telegram from the Mission to the United Nations to the Department of State, New York, June 22, 1967, 0455Z," FRUS, vol. 19, document 314.

¹³⁵ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, June 13, 1967," FRUS, vol. 19, document 283.

Indeed, according to the intelligence passed on to Anderson, King Faisal worried that unrest over Jerusalem could affect his own political survival.¹³⁶

The Saudis also pressed their case informally, as Johnson learned from Everett Dirksen.

President Johnson and Everett Dirksen, 22 June 1967, 10.45pm¹³⁷

Everett Dirksen: I'm on a pay phone.

President Johnson: Yeah. Yeah. Go ahead.

Dirksen: these people I had dinner with—one of them just got in from Paris tonight. He is the executive vice president of Mobil Oil.

President Johnson: Yes.

Dirksen: [*with Johnson concurring*] They have a 10 percent interest in ARAMCO. Some of their people were in attendance when, yesterday morning, Faisal of Saudi Arabia had a meeting with five or six of the foreign ministers—including Syria, Algeria, Jordan, and Egypt.

They tried, of course, to sell him a bill of goods—that we had started the Israelis, that we were in the [*unclear*]

President Johnson: Yeah, I read the report on that.

Dirksen: All that sort of thing.

President Johnson: I read the report on it. We got an intelligence report on it.

Dirksen: Yeah. Faisal just laughed them off.

President Johnson: Yeah.

Dirksen: Said it was sheer nonsense.

President Johnson: That's right. Nonsense is the word he used.

Dirksen: Yeah. Now, the one thing that he is interested in, and that Kuwait is interested in, was that fifth item of yours in your statement of principles—namely, territorial integrity.

President Johnson: Yeah.

¹³⁶ "Telegram from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas, Washington, July 6, 1967, 2058Z," FRUS, vol. 19, document 346.

¹³⁷ *President Johnson and Everett Dirksen (excerpt), 10.45pm, 22 June 1967, Tape WH6706.02, Citation #11912, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Eleven.*

Dirksen: Now, Brown mentioned that ([British foreign secretary] George Brown) in his statement before the UN. Arthur [Goldberg] mentioned it, too. But they think that it's got to have some emphasis in order to persuade these people over there that we mean business in that field.

President Johnson: Mm-hmm.

Dirksen: It's just a question of how far you go. I think you've got to be rather cautious about it.

President Johnson: [*with Dirksen concurring throughout*] Well, we've talked to—we have talked to Kosygin about that specifically. And we don't think that the Israelis are at all interested in Syria's boundaries. We don't think that they're interested in the Egyptian boundaries. The Jordan thing we hope is negotiable.

As a matter of fact, I asked them yesterday to encourage the King of Jordan to come on over here.

The Israelis have said, in effect, that they're not after this Syrian territory, Egyptian territory. They just want to live and let live. They, I think, would be pretty willing to follow recommendations to give that back and get out of there.

But, on Jordan, they hope that's negotiable. This little area there—they hope that they can do it to the satisfaction of the Jordanians themselves, and our people think they can.

So I think that we have some chance on it.

Johnson, of course, badly underestimated the difficulty in resolving the fate of "this little area there." But as June passed into July, he and his chief advisors began thinking more seriously about how actively they should involve themselves in brokering an Israeli-Jordanian peace settlement. In a July 12 memorandum, Bundy affirmed that "there is substantial agreement within the Executive Branch that Israel's own long-run interests would be served by a truly generous settlement with Hussein. I think there is also agreement that if we use our full influence, we can greatly affect the readiness of the government of Israel to move in this direction. But what is not clear is whether we are ready to apply our full influence in this direction, in the light of the depth and strength of the feelings of the people of Israel and of their supporters in the United States. With the best will in the world, our relations to both Hussein and Israel will

tend to involve us more and more in their negotiations. If we mean to use our influence at the clutch, this involvement is desirable simply because it keeps us in touch with the state of play. But if we mean to stand aside on the substantive issues—if we are unwilling to press either side to make concessions it does not now contemplate, then it is of critical importance that our people be restrained and careful.”¹³⁸

Rusk, on the other hand, was far more pessimistic about any U.S. involvement. He instead recommended Sweden or Switzerland as possible mediators. Johnson was dubious about the suggestion: “The clock is ticking. There is no question but what the Arabs have no confidence in us. We can’t sit and let these things go.”¹³⁹

Yet as the summer drew on, even Bundy grew more frustrated about the attitude of the moderate Arab states, and more pessimistic about the possibility of a settlement. Given the Arabs’ refusal to negotiate and increasing signs that Israel planned “to keep not only all of Jerusalem but the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, too,” the special advisor saw little the United States could do. In any event, “as long as the Arabs are adamant, I doubt if we can or should make the Israeli view of Jerusalem or the West Bank into a federal case. We can’t tell the Israelis to give things away to people who won’t even bargain with them. We may well,” he concluded, “be heading toward a de facto settlement on the present cease-fire lines.”¹⁴⁰

As had occurred on U.S.-Soviet questions, in the end, the Johnson administration concluded that the diplomatic gulf separating its position from that of the moderate Arab states was too wide.

III. Congress

In 1999, C-SPAN asked 60 historians, journalists, and presidential scholars to rate the Presidents in ten categories. In nine of the ten listings, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln, or Franklin Delano Roosevelt unsurprisingly received the highest ranking. But in one category—relations with Congress—first place went to Johnson.¹⁴¹

In his first two years in office, Johnson’s record with Congress was nothing

¹³⁸ “Paper Prepared by the President’s Special Consultant (Bundy), Washington, July 18, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 374.

¹³⁹ “Notes of Meeting, Washington, July 18, 1967, 6:06-7:30pm” FRUS, vol. 19, document 375.

¹⁴⁰ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Consultant (Bundy) to President Johnson, Washington, July 31, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 399.

¹⁴¹ <http://www.americanpresidents.org/survey/historians/35.asp>, last accessed 2 Mar. 2008.

short of extraordinary. By Election Day 1964, Congress had approved 39 of the 44 unpassed bills that Johnson inherited from the Kennedy administration—including, most significantly, the Civil Rights Act. In 1965, Congress translated Johnson's "Great Society" into policy, approving the Voting Rights Act, establishing Medicare and Medicaid, and strengthening federal government support for environmental regulation and the arts.

Yet even as he achieved these domestic triumphs, Johnson's relationship with Congress on foreign policy matters had deteriorated badly. A few months before the 1964 election, Johnson pushed through Congress the Tonkin Gulf Resolution. The House unanimously passed the resolution; in the Senate, dissenting votes came from only two members—Wayne Morse (D-Oregon) and Ernest Gruening (D-Alaska). The duo denounced the measure as a predated declaration of war, but most congressional Democrats were persuaded by J. William Fulbright's argument that Johnson would return to Congress before escalating U.S. involvement and that the bill would help the President in the campaign against Republican Barry Goldwater.¹⁴²

In early 1965, however, Johnson first authorized a bombing campaign against North Vietnam and then dramatically increased the number of U.S. combat troops sent to the region. In response, several prominent Senate liberals, led by Frank Church (D-Idaho), George McGovern (D-South Dakota), and Gaylord Nelson (D-Wisconsin), began to publicly criticize the administration's handling of the war. In the summer of 1965, Fulbright used his chairmanship of the Foreign Relations Committee to investigate the U.S. military intervention in the Dominican Republic, and eventually produced a report that all but stated the President had lied about his reasons for sending in the Marines. (The report shattered the personal relationship between Johnson and the man he had dubbed "my Secretary of State" when they were Senate colleagues.) In February 1966, Fulbright's committee conducted nationally televised hearings on the Vietnam War, characterized by blistering questions from a majority of the committee members and skepticism about the administration's policies from such architects of containment as George Kennan and retired general James Gavin. From the right, the President sustained criticism from senators such as Strom Thurmond (R-South Carolina) and John Stennis (D-Mississippi), who urged him to escalate the war in Vietnam and give the military free rein to carry the war to the North. By the end of 1966, the President's foreign policy received consistent backing from only a handful of senators, the most prominent of which was Gale McGee (D-Wyoming).¹⁴³

¹⁴² Author interviews with George McGovern (7 Jan. 1994) and Gaylord Nelson (8 Jan. 1964).

¹⁴³ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, p. 114-5.

Events in the Middle East provided an opportunity for Johnson to rebuild some of his Senate support. Shortly before the outbreak of fighting in the region, Dean Rusk observed that “we were witnessing an interesting reversal of roles—doves have become hawks, and vice versa.”¹⁴⁴ Many of the Senate’s leading critics of the Vietnam War, such as Gruening and Church, were also among the upper chamber’s most enthusiastic supporters of Israel. Johnson’s willingness to back Eshkol, then, might lead such figures to temper criticism of his overall conduct of foreign policy.

Fulbright, meanwhile, was a special case, since the Arkansas Democrat was perhaps the Senate’s leading critic of Israel. The President reached out to his friend-turned-foe by stressing the aspects of his Five Principles of Peace statement that the Saudis had found attractive.

President Johnson and J. William Fulbright, 10.57pm, 19 June 1967¹⁴⁵

President Johnson: If you will look at my speech, with the fellow coming over here—

J. William Fulbright: I think that your speech was OK. I liked it. I [*unclear*] as a matter of fact—

President Johnson: I sent you a copy of it; I don’t know whether you got it

Fulbright: I got a copy, and I heard it this morning. But I think that the part where you stood up to Israel by saying you still believe in territorial integrity was pretty damn good.

President Johnson: Well . . .

Fulbright: I was afraid they was going to put on a lot of pressure on you—

President Johnson: And I said, “A little humility,” too. I said. “We’ve got to have a little humility in this operation.” And—

Fulbright: That’s right. Well, I thought—

President Johnson: I’m trying to balance this thing as much as I can—

Fulbright: I thought you did—

President Johnson: We’ve got a reasonably good reaction

¹⁴⁴ “Memorandum for the Record, Washington, May 24, 1967, 12:35-1:25pm,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 54.

¹⁴⁵ *President Johnson and J. William Fulbright (excerpt), 10.57pm, 19 June 1967, Tape WH6706.01, Citation #11908, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Twelve.*



Johnson and Senator J. William Fulbright. [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

from the Arab world. And we got an awfully good reaction from the Congress. Dick Russell told me tonight he thought it was as perfect an operation as he had ever seen.¹⁴⁶

Fulbright: Well, I thought it was.

In the end, however, regardless of what occurred in the Middle East, Johnson's breach with Fulbright was irreparable. One of the President's few Senate supporters on foreign policy questions, Russell Long (D-Louisiana), entertained few illusions that his Arkansas colleague could be wooed.

President Johnson and Russell Long, 7.48am, 14 June 1967¹⁴⁷

President Johnson: If I said to one senator—I never saw a senator I could say anything to that wouldn't repeat it.

Russell Long: Not even Dick Russell?

President Johnson: No. No, sir. Not in my life. Not one.

As a matter of fact, most of my trouble last week with the Israel thing was because we said to senators that we hoped that we would get a declaration, and then a flotilla over there—and in 20 minutes after they walked out, by God, every communist country in the world was pressuring the other countries not to go with us because this was our plan.

Long: The time you told Bill Fulbright that, Mr. President, you knew that the Soviet ambassador was going to know that within six hours. I mean, you need to have known that if you told Bill Fulbright. [*Both laugh.*]

Even if Fulbright were lost, Johnson saw no reason not to try and receive some benefit for having stood up for Israel. American Jews, he complained, disproportionately filled the ranks of Vietnam War critics. And Senate liberals who questioned the use of force in Southeast Asia seemed to have no qualms

¹⁴⁶ Georgia senator Dick Russell, who chaired the Senate Armed Services Committee, was an old Johnson friend.

¹⁴⁷ President Johnson and Russell Long (excerpt), 7.48am, 14 June 1967, Tape WH6706.01, Citation #11908, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Thirteen.

about a muscular policy on Israel's behalf. Perhaps, he mused, UN ambassador Arthur Goldberg could bring this lesson home to groups that had stopped listening to him.

President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg, 9.15am, 15 July 1967¹⁴⁸

President Johnson: Why don't you get—come down and visit with some of your Foreign Relations [Committee] friends—

Arthur Goldberg: I will. I'm coming down—

President Johnson: Tell them what's going on.

Goldberg: If this damn circus [at the UN] is over by Wednesday, I'm coming down for the cabinet meeting, and I'll ask Bill Fulbright to have a little meeting over there, and I'll talk about these things.

President Johnson: Go over and tell them everything that's happened, so they'll know.

Goldberg: Sure.

President Johnson: We're going to have to have them, because if you don't, some of these Arab Southerners are going to take out on us. They're already complaining a little bit, and . . .

Goldberg: Yeah. Well, I'd be glad to go in and talk to Dick Russell in the Senate, and a few others.

President Johnson: Oh, he really murdered us on—

Goldberg: What the hell was he so excited—was that a Tshombe business?¹⁴⁹

President Johnson: No, he just—they all got upset. That was kind of a warning, you know, for me not to do anything with Israel.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: They wanted to use this—they knew my three planes weren't going to bother anything.

¹⁴⁸ *President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg (excerpt), 9.15am, 15 July 1967, Tape WH6707.01, Citation #12003, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Fourteen.*

¹⁴⁹ *Russell and John Stennis, both of whom sympathized with the Katanga separatist movement of Moise Tshombe, had delivered Senate speeches asserting that Johnson had exceeded his constitutional authority by sending three U.S. warplanes to bolster the central government of Congo. Despite Johnson's interpretation to Goldberg, they offered no evidence to suggest that their criticism had anything to do with events in the Middle East.*

Goldberg: Uh-huh.

President Johnson: They just wanted to show me that I can't move without . . . And . . .

Goldberg: They weren't so vociferous when Ike landed the Marines in Lebanon [in 1958].¹⁵⁰

President Johnson: No, no. they're not. But they get awfully vociferous.

But I think that we're all right.

They're just chewing up our aid program. We're not going to have any aid program.

Goldberg: Are they?

President Johnson: Fulbright's just so upset about Vietnam.

As Johnson quickly discovered, however, a Congress that had grown more aggressive on international matters questions in general was unlikely to remain silent on as an issue as politically charged as U.S. policy toward the Middle East.

On June 11, Senator Jacob Javits (R-New York) delivered a high-profile address at New York's Madison Square Garden. With more than 18,000 in attendance for a "Stars for Israel" rally designed to raise funds for the United Jewish Appeal, Javits announced plans to introduce a resolution designed to guide the administration's Middle Eastern peacemaking efforts.

His chief aim, it soon became evident, was to link Johnson firmly with Eshkol's government. "We must not stand by," the senator declared, "as Israel is asked to pull back from positions gained through the expenditures of so much blood and heroism unless it is made certain that Israel's future is guaranteed." Accordingly, Javits demanded a resolution that would call for an end to the arms race in the region (a condition, he claimed, which had been "fostered by the Soviet Union"); a guarantee, with an international enforcement mechanism, for free passage of Israeli ships through the Gulf of Aqaba; and a plan for settling Palestinian refugees outside of Israel.¹⁵¹

Johnson actually supported Javits' basic goals. But he saw nothing to be gained by codifying them in a Senate resolution. That Javits announced his plan while sharing the stage with Johnson's nemesis—former Attorney General

¹⁵⁰ *In the sole implementation of the Eisenhower Doctrine, the United States sent Marines to Lebanon in 1958, to prop up the government of Christian president Camille Chamoun.* Erika Alin, *The United States and the 1958 Lebanon Crisis* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1994).

¹⁵¹ *New York Times*, 12 June 1967.

Robert Kennedy, elected to the Senate from New York in 1964—only further infuriated the President.

Although Johnson and Dirksen belonged to differing parties, they had been good friends in the Senate and worked closely together during much of Johnson's time as President. In a late-night phone call a few days after the Javits/Kennedy rally, Johnson made perfectly clear what he thought about the New York senator's effort.

President Johnson and Everett Dirksen, 22 June 1967, 10.45pm¹⁵²

Everett Dirksen: They read me a long cable tonight, that covered that Faisal meeting.

President Johnson: Well, I have that. We got that in our intelligence. It was very good. His people told it to us, too. And the Kuwaits [sic] have been pretty good.

Dirksen: Yeah. So they have.

President Johnson: The Arabs cannot unify behind anything ever except the Jews.

Dirksen: Well, now—

President Johnson: And if the goddamn Jews would behave, and be quiet, and let you talk for them or let [Majority Leader Mike] Mansfield talk for them, or let somebody else—instead of Goldberg and [New York senator Jacob] Javits and all them . . .

That just sets them afire when they get up—

Dirksen: Yeah.

President Johnson: They just get afire.

Dirksen: By the way, you didn't forget to tell Nick [Katzenbach] to get on Jack [*unclear*], did you?

President Johnson: I told Nick to come talk to you, and get your judgments on it. He's not for the resolution.

Dirksen: No.

President Johnson: He thinks we oughtn't to have any resolution.

Dirksen: Yeah. Well, Jack [Javits] was working like a goddamn eager beaver, you know.

President Johnson: Well, he wants to, and I can understand

¹⁵² *President Johnson and Everett Dirksen (excerpt), 10.45pm, 22 June 1967, Tape WH6706.02, Citation #11912, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Fifteen.*

his concern. I'd be worried if it was Texans. But he just—it's not wise. That's not the best thing.

Dirksen: Yeah.

President Johnson: Because somebody else . . . You know, it's a man that's a fool that is his own lawyer.

Dirksen: Yeah. But the hell of it is you can't talk him out of it when he gets these ideas. And then he just scours that goddamn [Senate] floor.

President Johnson: Yeah.

Dirksen: Saying, "Will you join with me in this resolution?"

Strong pressure from the administration watered down the Javits resolution, transforming it into a general affirmation of support for peace in the Middle East. But the affair testified to the difficulty Johnson faced in translating the general approval his Middle East policies received from senators into a broader sympathy for his handling of international affairs.

Five: The United Nations

From the start, Johnson and his advisors understood that a diplomatic settlement to the conflict would involve the United Nations. Yet at the close of fighting, key questions remained unanswered: would the General Assembly weigh in on the issue, or would the Security Council alone craft a solution? Could U.S. support overcome Israel's understandable distrust of UN actions? And how significantly did the U.S. and Soviet visions of a UN role differ?

Both British and U.S. diplomats clearly understood their weak position in the UN. Two days after fighting ended, State Department officials told the President that the United States risked being in a "small minority" at the UN if the Soviets pushed for a resolution demanding an immediate Israeli withdrawal to the pre-fighting lines. McNamara, meanwhile, conceded that "we're in a heck of a jam on territorial integrity," since the Israelis had given no indication of a willingness to return, at the very least, East Jerusalem to Jordan. Johnson agreed that the key question for American diplomats would be defining the term "'territorial integrity' of all states." At the very least, he told his advisors, the United States needed to remind Israel of its wartime diplomatic support. It was, he said, time to tell Eshkol that "it wasn't [Defense Minister Moshe] Dayan that kept Kosygin out."¹⁵³

The United States and the USSR outlined contrasting approaches to a UN resolution shortly after a cease-fire. Kosygin argued that Israel needed to withdraw from all occupied territories first, and then the UN could address other issues, such as maritime rights or Arab non-belligerency. Johnson and U.S. diplomats preferred addressing all these matters as a package.

A few days after fighting ended, Soviet ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin sat down with Rusk to flesh out the two sides' differences. Why, asked Dobrynin, did the United States oppose Israeli withdrawal from all the territory it occupied during the war? Rusk countered: "Withdrawal to what"? Israel pulling back to the armistice lines, he argued, was an unrealistic expectation as long as the Arab states refused to recognize Israel's right to exist. Would they be willing to do so at any point in the near future?¹⁵⁴ A month later, Dobrynin conceded that none of the Arabs seemed very "eager" to enter into such an arrangement.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵³ "Notes of a Meeting of the Special Committee of the National Security Council, Washington, June 12, 1967, 6:30pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 269.

¹⁵⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, June 16, 1967, 3:05-3:55 pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 301.

¹⁵⁵ "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 8, 1967, 3pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 347.

As discussions between U.S. and Soviet diplomats dragged into early July, Johnson described himself as “more concerned about the Soviet position in the Middle East than Secretary McNamara and Secretary Rusk appeared to be.”¹⁵⁶

The two sides did agree, in Rusk’s words, about an “interest in not having the UN General Assembly come out with a zero.”¹⁵⁷ Yet accomplishing this goal proved more difficult than Rusk had expected. As both Everett Dirksen and Bob Anderson had warned, the Islamic world displayed particular concern with the fate of Jerusalem, since postwar Israeli actions clearly envisioned unification and ultimate annexation of the entire city. On June 28, Israel redrew and expanded the city’s boundaries, increasing the percentage of Jews inside the city’s limits. The next day, IDF troops removed the military barriers that had separated Arab East Jerusalem from the city’s western portion. In remarks to the Security Council, Abba Eban unpersuasively denied that the moves had any “political” overtone, and instead described them as concerned “exclusively with the urgent necessities of the ravages and dislocations arising from the division of the city’s life.”¹⁵⁸

In response, the delegation from Pakistan sponsored a General Assembly resolution calling upon Israel to “desist forthwith from taking action which would alter the status of Jerusalem” and requesting the Secretary General to report back on the matter within a week. The General Assembly unanimously passed the resolution on July 4, 1967; the United States and Britain abstained.

Israel responded to the resolution with a letter from Eban, who took a quite different tone than in his Security Council statements from late June. After reviewing Jordan’s failure to ensure Jewish access to the Old City’s religious sites, Eban declared, “The changes which have affected Jerusalem’s life and destiny as a result of the measures recently adopted may therefore be summarised as follows: Where there was hostile separation, there is now harmonious civic union. Where there was a constant threat of violence, there is now peace. Where there was once an assertion of exclusive and unilateral control over the Holy Places, exercised in sacrilegious discrimination, there is now a willingness to work out arrangements with the world’s religious bodies—Christian, Muslim and Jewish—which will ensure the universal religious character of the Holy Places. The Government of Israel is confident that world opinion will welcome the new prospect of seeing this ancient and historic metropolis thrive in unity,

¹⁵⁶ “Editorial Note, 12 July 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 353,

¹⁵⁷ “Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 8, 1967, 3pm,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 347.

¹⁵⁸ Donald Neff, “Jerusalem in U.S. Policy,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, Vol. 23 (1993), pp. 31-2.

peace and spiritual elevation.”¹⁵⁹ U Thant then produced a report declaring Israel in non-compliance with the Pakistani resolution.

In response, the Pakistanis introduced a new, tougher, resolution. What became General Assembly Resolution 2254 (“Measures taken by Israel to change the status of the City of Jerusalem”) deplored “the failure of Israel to implement General Assembly resolution 2253”; reiterated the “call to Israel in that resolution to rescind all measures already taken and to desist forthwith from taking any action which would alter the status of Jerusalem”; and requested “the Secretary-General to report to the Security Council and the General Assembly on the situation and on the implementation of the present resolution.”¹⁶⁰

The new resolution produced a dilemma for U.S. policymakers, which Walt Rostow summarized in a July 13 memorandum.¹⁶¹ Goldberg, Rostow noted, felt that the United States “should not shift off our position of abstention.” The ambassador believed that “we have taken our lumps in the UN General Assembly and the international community on this issue”; a shift in position also would leave “the Jewish community here . . . up in arms.” Rostow and Bundy, on the other hand, reasoned that in light of Eban’s “unsatisfactory” response to the Secretary General, “something more than a deal on the Holy Places with the Vatican is required if we are going to have a stable Middle East.”¹⁶²

In Rostow’s mind, three choices existed for the United States: (1) “to go with Arthur Goldberg and abstain again”; (2) “to switch our position to support for the Pak resolution, using the unsatisfactory character of the Israeli response as a justification”; or (3) “to stay with abstention and make two statements,” one from Goldberg and the other from Rusk, taking issue with Israeli actions in the city. Both Bundy and Rostow believed that “to get the proper attention and hardness into our position before our own people, the moderate Arabs, etc., a statement from Washington by the Secretary of State is essential.” (Goldberg, in Bundy’s opinion, “cannot really swing it politically.”) The Rostow/Bundy position, moreover, would allow the United States to “begin to balance our accounts somewhat with the moderate Arabs; and it is a good issue because

¹⁵⁹ Abba Eban to U Thant, 10 July 1967, copy at <http://www.mfa.gov.il/MEA/Foreign+Relations/Israels+Foreign+Relations+since+1947/1947-1974/16+Letter+from+FM+Eban+to+Secretary-General+U+Thant+on+Jerusalem.htm>, accessed 2 April 2008.

¹⁶⁰ <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/b792301807650d6685256cef0073cb80/3e28f2c76bea214852560df00575c0e!OpenDocument>, accessed 2 April 2008.

¹⁶¹ “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, July 13, 1967, 10:30am,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 357.

¹⁶² “Memorandum from the President’s Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, July 13, 1967, 10:30am,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 357.

we believe that this position is right both for the U.S. and, in the long run, for the Israelis themselves." Rostow concluded that the United States might even consider voting for a "diluted" Pakistani resolution; otherwise, he urged the President to couple any abstention with remarks from both Washington and New York strongly rebuking Israel.¹⁶³

Johnson conceded the need for the two statements, but rejected language that directly criticized Israel. "What I want to say," he told his advisors to general laughter, "is that we regret their unwillingness to budge." Clark Clifford, asked by Johnson to assist in the drafting, urged the President not to "be too specific," preferring a "general" approach that would not tie the United States down in the future. Johnson and Clifford got their way; the statement issued by Rusk was bland and general.¹⁶⁴

The day of the UN vote, however, the President received a surprise: Britain and Canada, who had intended to join the United States in abstaining from the resolution, changed their mind and voted aye, after the Pakistanis agreed to cosmetic changes in the language. Their shifts left the final vote on the resolution 99 to 0, with 18 abstentions. Early the next morning, Johnson phoned Goldberg to commiserate, and also to reflect on the discussions at Glassboro.

President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg, 9.15am, 15 July 1967¹⁶⁵

President Johnson: I didn't say a word [to Kosygin]. I just said, "You try to get Syria to close down." But I—like Theodore Roosevelt—I just said it in a soft voice. But I turned them around—

Arthur Goldberg: That's—

President Johnson: —And I moved right up there close to them, and they understood that. [*Chuckles.*]

Goldberg: That's damn good. That's exactly the way to treat them.

You know, the other evening, when we were trying to work out these few observers, you know, to send to the [Suez] canal?

¹⁶³ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, July 13, 1967, 10:30am," FRUS, vol. 19, document 357.

¹⁶⁴ "Memorandum from the President's Deputy Press Secretary (Johnson) to President Johnson, Washington, July 14, 1967, 12:30-12:51pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 363.

¹⁶⁵ *President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg (excerpt), 9.15am, 15 July 1967, Tape WH6707.01, Citation #12003, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Sixteen.*



Arthur Goldberg, meeting with the President. "He talks a good deal when he ought to be listening," complained Johnson. [Lyndon Baines Johnson Presidential Library.]

President Johnson: Yeah.

Goldberg: This blustering Soviet ambassador [Nikolai] Federenko made a big speech privately, you know, trying to bear down on us, that we were the obstructers.

I lost my temper, and I told him to stop. He didn't intimidate me. Come on back to the Council, and we'll debate it publicly, as to who was making the most peaceful proposal. And they backed down.

President Johnson: This damn Gromyko's the mean one, though. He is—

Goldberg: Mm-hmm. Well, he's a record player.

President Johnson: He's up here at Glassboro, and he just busts up everything.

Goldberg: Yeah. He's still hanging around here?

President Johnson: Yes, that's right. As long as he is, he's going to have trouble.

Goldberg: Yeah. Well—

President Johnson: He's just—

Goldberg: Dean [Rusk] has called me—

President Johnson: Every time this fellow would try to agree to something—every time Kosygin tried to agree—he wouldn't let him.

Goldberg: He would hold him back?

President Johnson: Yes, sir.

Goldberg: Dean had talked about coming back here. I said he's welcome, but I would not dignify his presence. We ought to close this damn business and get him out of here.

President Johnson: I'd sure get him away as quick as I can.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: Because he is no damn good. He's poison.

Goldberg: He's warmed up his plane about three or four times.

President Johnson: Why, you let him go. Quit holding him.

Goldberg: Yeah. But the only way we'll get him out of here is to wind up this [*unclear*].

President Johnson: Yeah. Well, I hope you can do it

next week.

Goldberg: Yeah. Well, I'm hopeful—

President Johnson: What about the Security Council? What will they do on sanctions [against Israel]?

Goldberg: No, they won't—well, there we are! We may be left alone again. But I wouldn't think that would be possible. I think we'd get some support against this. Although we've had some very weak reeds . . . You saw the British . . .

President Johnson: Looks like hell that the British quit us on this, and just 18 of us abstained.

Goldberg: Yeah. And it was—I told Rusk, it was kind of a motley company.

President Johnson: Who were the 18 with us?

Goldberg: Well, a couple of Africans, a few Latin Americans. That was about it.

President Johnson: Who were the Latins?

Goldberg: Uh, the Latins—

President Johnson: Nicaragua? [*Chuckles.*]

Goldberg: It's published in the Washington Post; I don't have the list in front of me.¹⁶⁶

President Johnson: Nicaragua, I guess.¹⁶⁷

[*Laughs heartily.*]

Goldberg: Yeah, you can guess. It wasn't a hell of an impressive showing. I felt a little lonesome over there.

President Johnson: Yeah, I did, too. I felt lonesome when I made it [the decision]. I knew it wouldn't be anybody. But . . .

Goldberg: But it's all right. It will go—our position was a pretty good position. We said that the whole kit and caboodle had to be settled. And I think that's all right.

¹⁶⁶ The abstentions were Australia, Barbados, Bolivia, Central African Republic, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Iceland, Jamaica, Kenya, Liberia, Madagascar, Malawi, Malta, Portugal, Rwanda, South Africa, United States, and Uruguay. <http://domino.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/b792301807650d6685256cef0073cb80/3e28f2c76e214852560df00575c0e!OpenDocument>, accessed 2 April 2008.

¹⁶⁷ The Somoza-led Nicaraguan dictatorship, in fact, voted in favor of the resolution.

The vote confirmed Bob Anderson's fear of U.S. inaction stimulating "anti-Americanism" in the Islamic world.¹⁶⁸ The decision to abstain also generated a skeptical response from the Soviets. Ambassador Dobrynin termed the abstention "hard to understand in view of the statements on the subject issued by the White House and the Department."¹⁶⁹

By early fall 1967, as the combination of Arab recalcitrance and Israeli suspicion doomed any possibility of a General Assembly solution, the question returned to the Security Council. Rostow noted that even there, Ambassador Goldberg believed "we've hit a dead-end," since the Soviets still wanted "a loose resolution calling for Israeli withdrawal which states Arab obligations loosely enough that they can be disregarded."¹⁷⁰ Nonetheless, most senior members of the administration believed that further delay would only diminish the prospects of a peaceful settlement, and accordingly called for a renewed effort. Rusk was especially adamant on this point.

Renewed pressure from the Soviet Union provided a reminder of the perils associated with inaction. In an October 20 letter to Johnson, Kosygin stated that his government "feels concerned over the fact that so far there has been no progress in the matter of a political settlement in the Near East." The two nations to blame? "The aggressor" (the Soviets' designated term for Israel), who refused to "withdraw her forces from the seized Arab territories"; and "the USA," whose "support" sustained Israel's "provocative and defiant manner." Indeed, Kosygin informed Johnson, the record of the previous three months showed that "Israel's expansionist ambitions find on the American side a benevolent attitude."¹⁷¹

Kosygin concluded the missive ominously: "The time has come to take resolute steps to put an end to the present dangerous situation in the Near East. One must not allow the political settlement be wrecked because Israel would like to realize her extreme claims behind which hides an unrestrained drive towards expansion. It appears that the Israeli leaders are little concerned with how this state will live tomorrow, without thinking of the consequences their

¹⁶⁸ "Telegram from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson in Texas, Washington, July 6, 1967, 2058Z," FRUS, vol. 19, document 346.

¹⁶⁹ "Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, July 24, 1967, 12:30 pm," FRUS, vol. 19, document 389.

¹⁷⁰ "Memorandum from the President's Special Assistant (Rostow) to President Johnson, Washington, October 12, 1967," FRUS, vol. 19, document 467.

¹⁷¹ "Letter from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, October 20, 1967," FRUS, vol. 19, document 480.

political short-sightedness may bring about.”¹⁷²

In a follow-up letter, Kosygin reminded Johnson that as the “natural resources of the Arab states and peoples . . . are of great importance to Europe, Asia and also to North America, . . . proposals and decisions on the Middle East problem should be based first of all upon due respect to this contribution by the Arab states, irrespectively of their internal political systems. One cannot allow the aggressor to gain through his actions a prize in terms of territories which did not belong to him, or in any other form. To take the route toward which the Israeli extremists, intoxicated by war chauvinism and wave of adventurism are now pushing, would mean to show benevolence for aggression, to defy the basic principles of justice and the U.N. Charter which bears not only our signatures but also that of Israel.”¹⁷³

While Kosygin blustered, Goldberg and the British ambassador to the UN, Lord Caradon, worked behind the scenes with the Egyptian, Jordanian, and Israeli diplomats—and the occasionally erratic Indian and Latin American representatives—to craft a Security Council resolution. On November 22, 1967, the Council unanimously adopted a measure formally sponsored by the British. Resolution 242 affirmed that “the establishment of a just and lasting peace in the Middle East . . . should include the application of both the following principles: (i) Withdrawal of Israel armed forces from territories occupied in the recent conflict; (ii) Termination of all claims or states of belligerency and respect for and acknowledgement of the sovereignty, territorial integrity and political independence of every State in the area and their right to live in peace within secure and recognized boundaries free from threats or acts of force.”¹⁷⁴ The lack of an article before “territories” made the resolution acceptable to Israel, but U.S. diplomats remained uncertain whether the Soviets would exercise their Security Council veto until the moment of the vote. In the end, the Soviets joined a unanimous Council in voting to approve the resolution.¹⁷⁵

Passage of Resolution 242 began to close out Goldberg’s tenure at the UN. The ambassador had accepted the post under unusual circumstances. Johnson

¹⁷² “Letter from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, October 20, 1967,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 480.

¹⁷³ “Letter from Premier Kosygin to President Johnson, Moscow, undated,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 534.

¹⁷⁴ “The Situation in the Middle East,” 22 Nov. 1967, <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/RESOLUTION/GEN/NR0/240/94/IMG/NR024094.pdf?OpenElement>.

¹⁷⁵ “Editorial Note,” FRUS, vol. 19, document 541.

wanted him off the Supreme Court so the President could appoint his old friend, Abe Fortas, to the Court's "Jewish seat," and accordingly had persuaded him that he could help bring peace to Vietnam by resigning from the Court and accepting the UN ambassadorship. Instead, Goldberg exercised little influence over policy, and in early 1968, finally decided to resign the post to pursue a political career. He badly lost a bid for the New York governorship in 1970.¹⁷⁶

Johnson desired three chief characteristics in Goldberg's replacement. First, he needed a figure of sufficient prestige, to deflect the likely criticism from liberal Democrats upon Goldberg's departure. Second, the President wanted to avoid any strong public critics of his Vietnam policy. Finally, with Middle East issues likely to remain a focus at the UN, Johnson looked for a non-Jew, someone who would not appear to be biased in approaching regional matters.

In late 1967, the number of figures who fulfilled each of these qualifications was small indeed. But Wyoming Democrat Gale McGee fit the profile well. A history professor before scoring an upset victory to the Senate in 1958 (aided, in part, by campaign cash provided by then-Majority Leader Johnson), McGee had emerged as perhaps the Senate's most passionate defender of the Vietnam War. He also was a strong supporter of Israel, and his academic credentials elevated his foreign policy expertise.¹⁷⁷

When he served as majority leader, the heart of Johnson's power came from his ability to craft compromises, a task he accomplished through what some termed the "Johnson treatment" and what journalist William S. White more precisely described as "cajoling, entreating, flattering, blandly threatening, sometimes saying words and taking action that would have been forgiven in none other than a Senate type."¹⁷⁸ As he searched for a candidate to replace Goldberg, the President tried the "Johnson treatment" on McGee.

President Johnson and Gale McGee, 11.00am 9 Dec. 1967¹⁷⁹

President Johnson: I'm thinking about what's best for the country.

Gale McGee: Well, that would be—

President Johnson: And I don't know of a human that I

¹⁷⁶ David Stebenne, *Arthur Goldberg: New Deal Liberal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 352-68.

¹⁷⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, p. 114-5.

¹⁷⁸ William S. White, *Citadel: The Story of the U.S. Senate* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), pp. 89, 105, 210.

¹⁷⁹ *President Johnson and Gale McGee (excerpt)*, 9.00am, 9 Dec. 1967, Tape WH6712.01, Citation #12504, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Seventeen.

think is as knowledgeable in this general field, that is not New York-oriented, that is as articulate, that I think makes as good impression on TV. And I've watched them all.

I think you have a little of the mold of a [Woodrow] Wilson and a [Abraham] Lincoln combination. I think you have a little of the George Marshall and Sam Houston. I think you look a little bit frontier, and pioneer, and a fellow that's pulled himself up by his bootstraps. But I think you have enough sophistication and articulation that you're effective as hell.

Now, that's my type of man. I don't want one of these Adlai Stevensons. I liked him, but he's not—to me, I always kind of felt like he had to squat to pee.

Goldberg, on the other hand, is the best negotiator I have ever known.

McGee: Yes.

President Johnson: He does just absolutely have hydrophobia [excessive leaking].

McGee: Yes.

President Johnson: And he talks a good deal when he ought to be listening.

McGee: Mm-hmm.

President Johnson: But he is an effective negotiator. Now, you've got the great problems of the Middle East—and that's the most dangerous thing. Vietnam is just chickenfeed compared to what the Russians are doing over there, and what may happen there. You've got this Cyprus thing that's rough and tough.

[*Break.*]

President Johnson: I wouldn't agree, and I wouldn't imply, and I'd think of several people if something happened to Rusk as secretary of state.

McGee: Yes.

President Johnson: But I would say right in the beginning that one of the three names I'd think of would be yours.

McGee: Oh, my.

President Johnson: And I know you never have thought in those terms—

McGee: No.

President Johnson: But that's the way we think.

McGee: Yes.

President Johnson: I don't want that to enter into it, and I don't want it to be an implication, because I just very likely would appoint somebody else.

McGee: Yes.

President Johnson: But that's what we think.

McGee told the President that he would need to speak to his wife before reaching a decision. A few weeks later, he told Johnson that he "certainly would" be interested in the position, especially if the President went ahead with plans to run for re-election. But by that point, Johnson had changed his mind. He told George Ball, "I don't think I could take a man out of the Senate—he's not even up [for re-election] this year; he's a Democrat—that's as able as he is."¹⁸⁰ But Ball, Johnson's new preferred choice for the position, wanted to avoid another long-term stint in public service, and other possible nominees all had weaknesses. So the vacancy remained unfilled into 1968, with Goldberg lingering in the ambassadorship.

The President's diplomatic and political position, meanwhile, rapidly deteriorated. At the end of January 1968, communist forces launched the Tet Offensive, which culminated in guerrillas briefly occupying the U.S. embassy in Saigon. The embarrassing public relations setback discredited an administration that had insisted that victory in Vietnam would come soon. On the home front, after Robert Kennedy announced that he would not run for President, Johnson's only Democratic challenger was Eugene McCarthy, a low-profile senator from Minnesota. But on March 12, running on an anti-war platform, McCarthy almost defeated the President in New Hampshire's first-in-the-nation primary. Four days later, Kennedy changed his mind and jumped into the race.

With the President increasingly besieged both at home and abroad, a new problem suddenly emerged in the Middle East. On March 18, in the thirty-eighth Palestinian terrorist attack of the year, an Israeli school bus struck a mine; two adults were killed and several teenagers injured. Three days later, Eshkol ordered a reprisal raid, and Israeli forces entered Jordanian territory to attack Palestinian terrorist bases at Karameh and Safi. Palestinian forces vigorously resisted at Karameh; the battle left 27 Israelis, three Jordanian officers, and more

¹⁸⁰ *President Johnson and George Ball, 3.09pm, 25 Apr. 1968, Tape WH6804.02, Citation #12927, LBJ Recordings.*

than one hundred Palestinian fighters dead.¹⁸¹

Embarrassingly for the United States, personal missives from Johnson to Eshkol and King Hussein had just been transmitted to the U.S. embassies in Amman and Tel Aviv as the attack got underway.¹⁸² The President urged restraint upon Eshkol and called on King Hussein to work harder to hunt down Palestinian terrorists. Eshkol responded with a three-page letter explaining why he felt compelled to act.¹⁸³ King Hussein replied angrily. Given the likelihood of continued Israeli attacks, the King fumed, "Jordan, its head of state, its leaders, its armed forces and its people would all become the victims of American weapons, and their own faith in the United States and its President, as well as the friendship which they valued to the point of refusing to accept any other option to bolster their defence in the face of a history of continued aggression." Hussein also accused Johnson of unfairly holding Jordan responsible "for the safety and security of the Israeli forces of occupation in the West Bank of Jordan and the rest of the occupied Arab territories."¹⁸⁴

At the UN, India, Pakistan, and Senegal introduced a resolution condemning the Israeli raid but avoiding any mention of the Palestinian terrorist attacks. Goldberg, his tenure in New York drawing to a close, suggested modifying the resolution to include a statement that "all violent incidents and other violations of the cease-fire should be prevented."¹⁸⁵

With it unclear whether the sponsors would accept Goldberg's proposed language, the ambassador phoned the President to bring him up date on the Security Council discussions. The call, which occurred one week before Johnson abruptly announced his withdrawal from the 1968 election, featured the President suggesting that his growing political isolation had made him more sympathetic to Israel, and reaffirming his support for Israel in rather earthy terms.

¹⁸¹ *Telegraph*, 16 May 2002, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/1400177/1968-Karameh-and-the-Palestinian-revolt.html>, accessed 12 Apr. 2008.

¹⁸² "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, March 21, 1968, 0511Z," FRUS, vol. 20, document 119; "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Jordan, Washington, March 21, 1968, 0540Z," FRUS, vol. 20, document 120.

¹⁸³ "Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Israel, Washington, March 23, 1968, 2001Z," FRUS, vol. 20, document 124.

¹⁸⁴ "Telegram from the Embassy in Jordan to the Department of State, Amman, March 21, 1968, 1030Z," FRUS, vol. 20, document 122.

¹⁸⁵ <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/UN/unres248.html>, accessed 12 Apr. 2008.

President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg, 3.09pm, 24 March 1968¹⁸⁶

Arthur Goldberg: Of course, the poor King [Hussein] is in a hell of a box. His throat is in the . . . is there all the time.

President Johnson: Yeah, I feel sorry—

Goldberg: There isn't a hell of a lot more that he can do than what he's been doing.

President Johnson: I feel sorry for him. Although I thought he sent us kind of a mean wire—

Goldberg: Yes—

President Johnson: It was unnecessary.

Goldberg: Yes. Yes. I feel sorry for him.

President Johnson: I lost—I felt sorry for him, but I lost a little of my sympathy with his reply to my wire the other night, asking him to . . .

Goldberg: Yeah. Yes. Well, you know, they—

President Johnson: You saw my wire and his reply, didn't you?

Goldberg: No, I did not see that.

President Johnson: Well, when they [the State Department] sent the wire, they told Israel that this was disastrous.

Goldberg: Uh-huh.

President Johnson: It was pretty strong. I cut out a word or two of their mean wire to 'em. I said, "Are we wiring Jordan to watch them to watch these terrorist activities?" They said no. I said, "Well, why not?" Well, they didn't—this and that. I said, "Let's just send them both a wire? If you're going to wire one of them, let's send them both a wire."

So they sent them a wire. Eshkol came back with two pages, and said they're bombing his kids, and they were doing all these other things, and everything's provocative. He didn't—he didn't justify what he'd done, but he at least explained what motivated him.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: And was pretty reasoning to me.

¹⁸⁶ *President Johnson and Arthur Goldberg (excerpt), 3.09pm, 24 Mar. 1968, Tape WH6803.05, Citation #12843, LBJ Recordings, CD Track Eighteen.*

And the goddamn King wired me back and said, "Go to hell."

Goldberg: Really?

President Johnson: Yeah.

Goldberg: Well, you know the Arabs are impossible down here. I have to have the patience of a saint to deal with them. They always keep referring to our domestic events.

President Johnson: [*softly*] Mm.

Goldberg: And I have to slap 'em down. They're . . . a terribly emotional bunch.

President Johnson: You're the only man I know that's got as mean a type of assignment as I have. And I don't know how you do it as well as you do. I just honestly don't.

But . . . I sure as hell want to be careful, and not run out on little Israel.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: If they—because they haven't got many friends in the world.

Goldberg: I know they haven't.

President Johnson: They're in about the same shape I am. And the closer I got—I face adversity, the closer I get to them.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: Because I got a bunch of Arabs after me—about a hundred million of 'em, and there's just two million of us. [*Chuckles; Goldberg joins in.*] So I can understand them a little bit.

Goldberg: I—

President Johnson: And I don't want—there's nobody fussing at me, nobody raising hell with me. Nobody, not one human's called me about it.

I just . . . my State Department, sometimes—I just want to be damn sure that I don't wind up here getting in the shape Eisenhower did, where I want to put sanctions on 'em—

Goldberg: Well, we're never going to put sanctions on—

President Johnson: The only people they got in the

world, that they got faith in, I think, [i]s me and you. I was down there at the ranch, and I looked at 'em, and I . . .

They don't know when they're going to be run over; they don't know when they're going to die; they don't know when those goddamn Russians are going to come in there. They don't know anything.

And the only thing they got is a little hope, and a prayer, and a wing . . . for me, if my heart keeps beating. And I don't want 'em to look back and say, "Well, he got to limber tail, and he ran," and so forth.

Now, I've been hard and tough with them. I haven't given them their Phantoms.

Goldberg: Yeah.

President Johnson: I haven't done this or that. But I just—I'm damn sure going to give them to 'em, because I want the Russians to quit arming, and agree to file up there [at the UN] with you-all what they do arm, and they cut back on their ABM.

And if they're not going to do any of it, and they're going to continue to pour arms in there, I want to make them take the consequences of their actions—and I'm going to stick it up of Israel's bottom just as much as I've got.

Goldberg: Amen to that.

President Johnson: Well, that's what I'm going to do.

Goldberg: Yeah, well—

President Johnson: I didn't tell them [the Israelis] that. I just told them I wasn't going to—

Goldberg: No, no—

President Johnson: I wasn't going to be responsible. But that's what I'm going to do!

Goldberg: Right.

President Johnson: I said, "You don't need to worry if they [the Soviets] keep arming them [the Arabs]. I'm not going to let you just stay there and let you get eaten up, like the little boy that the calf was playing with. And his daddy walked out and saw him, and caught him. And he said, 'Bobby, you just going to stay there, and

let the calf eat me up?’” [*The President chuckles.*]

Goldberg: Mm-hmm. Well, there you’re absolutely, a thousand percent right.

In one of his final acts as UN ambassador, Goldberg saw his language accepted, and the Security Council unanimously adopted what became Resolution 248. With Johnson’s term coming to an end, Ball relented and agreed to serve a six-month stint as UN ambassador. And, as he had promised Goldberg, in late 1968 Johnson bowed to congressional pressure and authorized the sale of 50 F-4 (Phantom) jets to Israel, in the largest arms deal to that point in Israeli history.¹⁸⁷

Lyndon Johnson entered the White House in November 1963 with U.S.-Israeli relations stabilized after the 1962 Hawk sale but still tense, due to the dispute over nuclear nonproliferation. Johnson left the White House in January 1969 having helped establish the foundation for the current U.S.-Israeli strategic partnership, with the United States widely acknowledged as Israel’s most significant international supporter.

The President oversaw this transition without ever really providing a concrete link between a grand strategic vision of U.S.-Israeli relations on the one hand and specific policies on the other. Instead, he improvised, basing his decisions on a basic sympathy with Israel, a desire to prop up King Hussein’s government in Jordan, and a fear of Soviet penetration of the Middle East. Through it all, he remained well aware of the domestic effects of his actions—both in the United States, where he tried to use Middle East policy to repair his relations with anti-war liberals and with Congress; and in Israel, where he went to great lengths to avoid Israeli political squabbles, even to the extent of offering key diplomatic concessions.

The Vietnam War offers the best example of Johnson’s domestic political skills failing him on the international stage. With Israel, however, he put his abilities to good use, and bequeathed a policy legacy that benefited both countries.

¹⁸⁷ Mitchell Bard, “The 1968 Sale of Phantom Jets to Israel,” <http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsourc/US-Israel/phantom.html>, accessed 12 Apr. 2008.

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