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Perspectives on Power: John F. Kennedy and U.S.-Middle East Relations

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PERSPECTIVES ON POWER: JOHN F. KENNEDY AND U.S. -MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS

by

April R. Summitt

A Dissertation
Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
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A study of President John F. Kennedy's policy toward the Middle East illustrates the agency and unexpected power wielded by so-called "third world" countries during the Cold War era. In spite of careful planning in Washington, Middle East leaders often manipulated and directed Kennedy's approach to the region. Regional actors used American fears of Communism to gain increased financial aid, military support, and influence in the United Nations. Although seeming to submit to Western pressures in exchange for such support, these leaders played both superpowers against each other and shaped policy according to local needs. While this relationship meant a degree of dependency upon the United States, it also brought the ability to wield influence beyond their actual economic and military strength.

During this period, the American approach to the region shifted, not so much because of Kennedy's efforts to change it, but because of the actions of Middle East players. Israel persuaded Kennedy to sell it missiles, beginning a gradual process of becoming an arsenal for Israel. The Shah of Iran managed to persuade the United States that he was a reformer, thus assuring a steady flow of dollars. Eventually, the support of royalist Arab regimes vis-à-vis more radical ones further indicted the United States as an enemy of Arab nationalism.
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April R. Summitt
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Recent scholarship on the Cold War is finally focusing on the "third world," yet much of it tends to view these countries as pawns of the superpowers. This view ignores the impact of the decisions and actions of third world leaders on the Soviet Union and the United States. In most cases, successful Cold War policy occurred only when the interests of a superpower and the third world state converged. Although neo-colonial relationships did develop as a result of Cold War policy, most studies measure actions going in one direction: from the superpower to the so-called client-state. Scholars often ignore the actions of these clients, their collaboration with imperial powers, and the extent of their control over the relationship.

A study of President John F. Kennedy's policy toward the Middle East illustrates the agency and unexpected power wielded by nations peripheral to the main thrust of the Cold War. In spite of careful planning in Washington, Middle East leaders sometimes manipulated and often directed Kennedy's approach to the region. Actors such as President Gamal Abd al-Nasser of Egypt, King Hussein of Jordan, King Saud and Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister David Ben Gurion of Israel, and Shah Muhammad Riza Pahlavi of Iran used American fears of Communism to gain increased financial aid, military support, and influence in the United Nations. Although seeming to submit to Western pressures in exchange for such support, these leaders set the agenda for Kennedy's policy toward the region and shaped it according to their needs. While this
relationship meant a degree of dependency upon the United States, it also brought the ability to wield influence beyond their actual economic and military strength.

The Kennedy Administration is an excellent case study for the nature of power relationships during the Cold War because it came during a period in which policy shifted because of the actions of local players. This work is based on an analysis of diplomatic conversations between American ambassadors and officers in ten Middle East countries and their superiors in Washington. These conversations reveal conflicting aims of the United States and Middle East leaders, and the degree to which Kennedy and his advisors reshaped policy to meet new demands or conditions. Ben-Gurion persuaded Kennedy to sell Israel missiles, beginning a gradual process of the United States becoming an arsenal for Israel. This support damaged a fragile relationship with neutralist, Arab states. The Shah of Iran managed to persuade the United States that he was a reformer, thus assuring a steady flow of dollars. Similarly, Prince Faisal of Saudi Arabia created paper reforms in order to persuade Kennedy to provide military aid. King Hussein of Jordan promised reforms and threatened to seek Soviet help in order obtain increasing amounts of American aid. Eventually, American support of traditional Arab regimes vis-à-vis more progressive ones further branded the United States as an enemy of pan-Arab nationalism.

However, in order to understand the implications of this study, one must identify Arab nationalism as well as Kennedy’s aims for the Middle East. Kennedy and his advisors understood that there were two kinds of Arab nationalism at work in the region during the 1960s: a vague movement toward pan-Arab unity and nationalist goals of the separate states. In fact, conflicting aims of these two kinds of nationalism often created friction between Arab states, what Malcolm Kerr long ago labeled an “Arab Cold War.”
While Kennedy was wary of the first kind of nationalism, he supported the second. He viewed Arab unity as a threat only if it were not oriented to the West. Safer, perhaps, was a collection of independent Arab states with which he could negotiate on an individual basis.

Regardless of whether or not there was Arab unity, Kennedy intended to work with whomever was necessary in the region to further his aim: to minimize Soviet influence in the region and safeguard Western access to oil. Even though Kennedy would have liked to broker an Arab-Israeli peace or at least make significant progress toward that goal, he more realistically expected to maintain a balanced approach to both Arab states and Israel while minimizing the opportunities for Soviet infiltration. Although he gave other areas of the world much more time and energy, Kennedy saw the Middle East as an important arena in which to carry out Cold War aims. Kennedy called upon the State Department and staff of the National Security Council to spend heavily of their energies on the Arab-Israeli issue as well as the situation in Iran. Task forces and temporary committees often met on a weekly basis to analyze issues and shape policy recommendations on the Middle East and Kennedy frequently participated in the discussions. While overshadowed by Cuba and Vietnam, the Middle East received no small measure of attention.

In the Middle East, Kennedy had a unique opportunity during his administration. He was the only president from Franklin Roosevelt to Gerald Ford who did not have to cope with a major war in the region. The fact that Nasser and most of his Arab neighbors knew they could not afford war with Israel in the near future created a favorable environment for internal development and cooperation. If ever there was a time that the
United States could prove to be a supporter of Arab nations, it was the early 1960s. Similarly, this period was, perhaps, a period during which American presidents might have the most influence over Israeli actions and policy. Unfortunately, he missed this unique opportunity.

It is important, however, to view this failure in the context of Kennedy’s fear of Soviet aggression. When he took office, the Soviets were leading the space race and Americans feared they also led the missile race. Fidel Castro had taken over in Cuba, and Nikita Khrushchev had declared Soviet support for wars of national liberation around the world. As a result, perceptions of Soviet aims toward the Middle East heavily influenced all of Kennedy’s policy toward the region. As a result, Middle East actors were able to use the Cold War context to play each side off the other.

Kennedy’s view of the Middle East dictates the scope of this study. He and his advisors included in that region the following countries: Egypt, Jordan, Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Yemen. Although he occasionally made connections between Africa and the Middle East, Kennedy usually avoided this association. He also dealt with Turkey and Cyprus separately or as part of European policy and left other areas such as Aden and the Arab Emirates to the British. The use of terminology in this paper will also correspond to usage common to the diplomatic documents. For example, correspondents refer to the Arab refugees from Palestine as “refugees” or “Arab refugees” and never Palestinians. One exception involves the Sea of Galilee, which the National Geographic Society uses, rather than Lake Tiberius as Israel often referred to it. Additionally, this paper focuses almost exclusively upon the relationship of the Middle East with the United States, not with the Soviet Union or other
regions. The viewpoint is necessarily from the American side because it reveals the environment in which American diplomats made their decisions regarding the region. While hindsight and access to Soviet archives might reveal true, Soviet intentions for the Middle East, Kennedy’s administration made policy based only on what they could see or guess about Soviet intentions and Middle East conditions.

This work is unique because it is the first comprehensive study of the Kennedy administration’s Middle East policy and examines the methods regional actors used to shape their own policies irrespective of superpower pressures. It re-evaluates the power relationship between Cold War superpowers and the conflict’s periphery. In many ways, the Middle East became a surrogate playing field for Cold War contests, and in the midst of this tug-of-war, the periphery wielded unexpected power and influence over the policies of the superpowers. Both intended and unintended consequences of this relationship led to American policies that served Middle East players more than the United States.
LEGACIES OF THE PAST

The American relationship with the Middle East during the Cold War era is a complicated story. Both east and west considered the region vital to its security, but often, the contest over Europe relegated it to the back burner of policy-making. Local tensions, however, frequently forced the Middle East to the top of America’s priority list. The United States feared that local instability made the region, no less than other regions, vulnerable to communist infiltration. Indigenous nationalism troubled American presidents, as each sought to understand the implications it would have on the Cold War struggle.

As the costs of World War II forced the British to continue withdrawing from its empire, the United States reluctantly took its place in the Middle East.¹ American presidents approached the region with caution and sought to balance their relationship with Israel and the Arab states. Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower believed that local efforts to maintain neutrality were analogous to a Soviet alliance. Kennedy disagreed and attempted to accommodate regional nationalism and Cold War neutrality. Yet, the post-war presidents all shared the assumption that superpower status would enable them to direct the actions of Middle East leaders and insure western control of the region’s oil.

Truman and the Middle East

During the 1920s and 30s, the United States government kept its activities in the Middle East at a bare minimum, not wanting to encroach on Britain's sphere of influence. American oil companies, however, requested involvement of the government to protect their interests. The State Department of the Truman administration recommended that the U.S. strengthen its ties to King Abd al-Aziz Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia. The California Arabian Oil Company (changed to Arabian American Oil Company or ARAMCO in 1944) held a large oil concession in Saudi Arabia, which began paying large dividends by the late 1930s. The outbreak of World War II disrupted oil sales and shipments, forcing King Ibn Saud to demand money from the oil company to avoid bankruptcy. Both allies wanted to protect Middle East oil from Hitler where the Germans might seem a refreshing change from the British and French. When CASOC turned to the American government for help, Truman eventually agreed to extend aid to the Saudis under the existing program of Lend-Lease.

As the emerging Cold War pitted the U.S. against communism and the Soviet Union, Truman's focus in the Middle East centered on what the U.S. referred to as the "Northern Tier of states": Turkey, Greece, and Iran. The Truman administration considered these three nations important barriers to Soviet expansion into the region.

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3 For thorough coverage of the history of Middle East Oil and the US role in it, see Daniel Yergin, The Prize: The Epic Quest for Oil, Money, and Power (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1990), and David S. Painter, Oil and the American Century: The Political Economy of U.S. Foreign Oil Policy, 1941-1954 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

4 See Irvine H. Anderson, "Lend-Lease for Saudi Arabia" in Diplomatic History 3 (Fall, 1979); his larger work entitled ARAMCO, the United States and Saudi Arabia: A Study of the Dynamics of Foreign...
During the war, British and Soviet troops had occupied Iran to prevent Nazi access to its oil and to open up a supply line to the USSR. Once the war was over, however, both sides were reluctant to leave, lest the other stay. In addition, the struggle over Berlin added to the developing contest for territorial gain. Truman insisted that the Soviets withdraw from the area (as did the Iranians). Unwilling to go to war over Iran, Soviet forces finally withdrew in May 1946.5

Political tensions of the Cold War in the Middle East also involved Turkey. At the Yalta Conference of 1945, Franklin Roosevelt recommended a revision of the Montreaux Convention Agreement of 1936 that gave control of the straits to Turkey. The Soviets had long sought control of the straits in order to prevent any power from blocking their navy in the Black Sea and Roosevelt had been sympathetic. The atmosphere had now changed, however, and at the same time, civil war broke out in Greece between communists and monarchists, a conflict that convinced Yugoslavia to aid the communists. The Kremlin's mistrust of Yugoslavian President Josep Broz Tito meant it avoided direct involvement in the Greek Civil War. Still, Soviet pressure on Turkey and its reluctant withdrawal from Iran convinced the State Department that the Soviets intended to expand communist interests in the Middle East. The anti-Soviet Robert Kelley of the Department's Eastern Europe Division had trained Loy Henderson, head of the Middle East Division in the State Department. Henderson had also served with George Kennan in Moscow in the previous decade. This experience led him to interpret Soviet policy in the region as


highly aggressive and he informed his superiors in alarmist tones. He soon caught the ear of Secretary of State James Byrnes, who spoke to Truman about the Soviet threat.\textsuperscript{6}

If these fears were not enough to alarm the President, the British announced in February 1947 that they no longer could afford to aid Greece and Turkey. Any British withdrawal suggested possible victory for the communists. England pleaded with the U.S. to assume its aid program to Turkey. The costs of another world war had been too much for the British. Truman spoke to Congress on March 12, 1947, and asked for a large aid package by stressing the danger of Soviet expansion and control of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{7} Although the Truman Doctrine—as this approach was called—became the basis for Cold War containment policy applied in Europe, the Middle East served as the catalyst for its development. At first, neither Truman nor his advisors recognized any significant, strategic risk to the region below the Northern Tier. The British seemed in firm control of the region, and the United States believed its ally would serve American interests there. Truman focused on Berlin and the Marshall Plan.

Several crises, however, were developing in the region—the primary one in Palestine. Jews were immigrating, both legally and illegally, to Palestine in large numbers. Scholars disagree regarding Truman’s motives for supporting Jewish immigration and his subsequent recognition of the Israeli state just eleven minutes after its declaration. Some cite pressure from the Jewish lobby and the importance of pleasing


\textsuperscript{7} See Lawrence S. Wittner, American Intervention in Greece, 1943-1949 (NY: Columbia University Press, 1982).
a large, Jewish constituency in states such as New York. Others argue that Truman's own religious upbringing influenced him to "preserve Palestine as a Holy Land" and help displaced Jews at the same time. Truman could have also been trying to undercut his own State Department with which he frequently conflicted while also hoping to recognize the new state before the Soviets did. He further believed that the inclusion of another democratic country in the United Nations would improve the organization's chances for success.

Meanwhile, the British slowly lost control of the situation in Palestine. Violence between Arabs and Jews, and the unwillingness of either side to accept a bi-national Palestinian state, led the British to finally turn the problem over to the United Nations. The UN decided to partition Palestine to take effect in 1948 when the British mandate lapsed. Israel took the opportunity to declare an independent State of Israel, which Truman quickly recognized. Israel then asked for help from the United States in the resulting war with its Arab neighbors. Although he supported its independence, Truman did not want a formal alliance with Israel and he encouraged the new state to obtain arms and financial aid from western countries other than the United States.

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Eventually, the U.S. did sell arms to Israel during the Palestine War, as did
Czechoslovakia, and contributed to the victory over Arab states in 1949. Once the war
was over, Truman tried to pressure Israel into making peace with the Arabs, to repatriate
the approximately 500,000 Arab refugees that fled the new state, and relinquish control
of the Negev Desert. Israel, however, felt vulnerable and even Truman’s threat to
withdraw a $49 million dollar loan could not convince it to cooperate. The relationship
between Israel and the United States remained strained during Truman’s administration.
Israel constantly sought more weapons, money, and security assurances, and the United
States continued to try to influence Israel toward moderation.

The Palestine War and the creation of the State of Israel revealed two seemingly
dichotomous facts: war strengthened the concept of Arab nationalism; and at the same
time, the conflict highlighted and exacerbated inter-Arab rivalries. War also revealed
corruption and inefficiency of existing regimes and spurred demands for reform.
Therefore, the nationalist impulse most stimulated by the war was local, not pan-Arab.
The assassination of King Abdullah of Jordan in 1951 and a successful military coup in
Egypt in 1952 illustrated internal struggles to change and strengthen individual Arab
states. Inter-Arab rivalries prevented the success of a pan-Arab movement. Egypt wished
to lead any such unity, while Iraq saw itself as the logical center for a unified Arabia.

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12 See Uri Bailer, Between East and West: Israel’s Foreign Policy Orientation, 1948-1956
13 Kaufman, The Arab Middle East, 10.
14 For the latest work on the roots of Arab nationalism, see Rashid Khalidi, editor, et al., The
Origins of Arab Nationalism (NY: Columbia University Press, 1991), and Israel Gershoni and James P.
Jankowski, Rethinking Arab Nationalism in the Arab Middle East (NY: Columbia University Press, 1997).
Older, but important works include Hisham Sharabi, Nationalism and Revolution in the Arab World
(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966), and Malcolm H. Kerr, The Arab Cold War: Gamal Abd al-
Royal regimes in Saudi Arabia and the Hashemites of Jordan and Iraq often plotted against each other, seeking to overthrow their rivals to Middle East leadership. These rivalries and deep suspicions prevented the Arab states from working closely together in the war of 1948-49. They failed largely because of this lack of coordination and defeat simply served to deepen the distrust and suspicion.

In response to fear of the spread of Soviet power in the world, the United States, Great Britain, and France issued the Tripartite Declaration in May 1950. This pledge limited the sale of arms to Middle East countries to defensive weapons only. The "loss" of China to the communists in 1949, the development of nuclear capability by the Soviet Union, and the outbreak of war in Korea all emphasized the importance of the American policy of containment. The western allies intended the Tripartite Agreement to keep Middle East countries from becoming Cold War battlefields, exploitable by the Soviets. The agreement also established a secret Near East Arms Control Commission (NEAC) to monitor and regulate the flow of weapons to the region. The signatories pledged to prevent the use of weapons to alter the status quo in the Middle East. It was an effort at "even-handedness" between Jews and Arabs, but this agreement failed to lessen tension in the region or, in the end, prevent an arms race.15

Another conflict, the struggle over control of the Suez Canal, would further shape American policy toward the region. The British still held air bases in Egypt and control of the canal. With the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950, NATO allies believed that the British should keep the canal operating to ensure a constant supply of Middle East oil.

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The U.S. also saw Egypt as the most important Arab state in the region, and key to any lasting peace. To keep it out of the Soviet sphere, Truman wanted Egypt to be politically stable and fiscally sound. The Egyptians opposed the heavy British presence, and demanded their total withdrawal, as well as cessation of control over the Sudan, which Egypt claimed as a sphere of influence. The British refused and Truman backed the British.\(^\text{16}\)

Tensions increased between Britain and Egypt in 1951. Truman cooperated with England in planning a Middle East Command (MEC, later called the Middle East Defense Organization or MEDO), intending it to serve as a NATO for the region. Egypt rejected the alliance and demanded complete British withdrawal and Egyptian control of the Sudan. The United States tried to mediate between the two, an effort that only angered the British. Soon, violence broke out in Egypt, leading to an increase in the British military presence and the latter's seizure of power plants, communications, and major roads.\(^\text{17}\)

Finally, a revolution occurred in July 1952 when a group of Egyptian military officers seized control of the government and deposed King Farouk. Although the popular General Muhammad Naguib led the revolution, Colonel Gamal Abd al-Nasser eventually took over the reigns of power and declared himself president of Egypt in 1954. Immediately after the coup, Naguib and Nasser asked for U.S. aid against the British. For the first time in the Middle East, American and British aims directly clashed. With the return of the conservatives to power in 1951 in England, Prime Minister Winston

\(^{16}\) Peter Hahn, *The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt*, 102-109.

Churchill wanted desperately to hang on to this remaining vestige of the old, British Empire. The U.S., while sympathetic, felt it more important to improve relations with Arab states throughout the region.\(^\text{18}\)

As Naguib and Nasser continued to plead for financial aid and arms, they also intimated a willingness to join an alliance against the Soviet Union, led by the United States. The offer convinced the American Ambassador in Cairo, Jefferson Caffery, who pled the Egyptian case to the State Department. Acheson saw the point and urged assistance, but Truman refused to make a commitment.\(^\text{19}\) It was late 1952 and he preferred to leave any such decision to his successor.

In Iran, the United States worried that unstable conditions would allow the Soviets to return to the area. While American aid had stabilized Turkey and Greece, the British were less and less able to ensure Iran's stability. Shah Mohammad Riza Pahlavi had done little to strengthen his position with his people, especially the large estate holders in Iran. To make matters worse, a strong Tudeh (communist) party and most of the moderate middle class constantly criticized his government.\(^\text{20}\)

Iran's major source of discontent continued to be British control of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (A.I.O.C.). All sides of the political spectrum viewed this condition as a continuation of western imperialism in Iran. Unless Iran could control its own resources and benefit from its profits, imperialists would continue to control the future of


the country, depriving its citizens of true sovereignty. The U.S. viewed the Tudeh party as dangerous because of its pro-Moscow stance. If the Shah did not strengthen his hand and subdue his opposition, the Tudeh might take over, opening Iran to Soviet expansion and jeopardizing western control of its oil.

Then an interesting figure appeared on the scene: Muhammad Mossadeq, a member of one of Iran's most prominent families, who previously had served as provincial governor, finance minister, and justice minister. Now, as a member of the lower house of the Iranian parliament, or Majlis, Mossadeq called for the nationalization of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. With the support of a political party he created called the National Front, Mossadeq began campaigning for the passage of a nationalization bill and the end of British imperialism in Iran. Iranians viewed the current Prime Minister, Ali Razmara, as a puppet of the British and religious extremists assassinated him in 1951. Almost immediately, the nationalization bill passed and the Shah appointed Mossadeq Prime Minister.21

This action, of course, instantly made the British and Mossadeq enemies while the U.S. tried to keep London from taking military action in Iran. Under urging of the United States, the British decided to try economic pressure by declaring an embargo on Iranian oil. Worldwide buyers honored the embargo and the resulting unemployment and loss of revenue put a severe strain on the Iranian economy. Slowly, opposition from both the Tudeh and the National Front began to grow. Mossadeq's government was anything but stable, confirming American fears that the Tudeh party would eventually take over.

The United States became convinced that Mossadeq had to go and that only a strengthened Shah could bring stability to Iran. The Shah had reluctantly allowed his prime ministers to rule, but now, the State Department supported his desire to take control, at least for a while. This move would come back to haunt American policy-makers, but in 1952, it seemed wise. By the end of the Truman administration, Iran was experiencing a severe depression and the U.S. and Britain began to talk of an end to Mossadeq's government.  

Several assumptions dominated U.S. policy toward the Middle East during the Truman Administration. First, Americans assumed that the protection of western access to oil meant keeping the Soviets from it. Second, policy-makers saw political instability as a danger to their Cold War strategy. Third, recognition of the State of Israel created at least the perception of a special relationship with that country, at the expense of Arab claims in Palestine. Nevertheless, Truman generally attempted to keep a balanced approach to all parties and avoided where possible a close alliance with any regional power. The limiting of arms sales to both Israelis and Arabs, and limited involvement in local disputes, did serve to safeguard America from the strongest recriminations, and its restraint contrasted favorably with British Imperialism. The U.S. was the "good" power with which to deal and bargain. Middle East leaders developed their agendas accordingly and sought help from American administrations to achieve their goals.

The Eisenhower Doctrine

While Truman had been concerned about Soviet influence in the Middle East, Dwight D. Eisenhower was much more so, which inevitably led to a more interventionist policy. Eisenhower made use of covert operations to ensure favorable outcomes in Middle Eastern countries, and employed economic assistance to develop beneficial relationships in the region. Early in his administration, Eisenhower received a report from the National Security Council (NSC) stating that the greatest challenge to policy for the region was the perception that the U.S. was just another imperial power like Britain and France. 23 This attitude would open the region to Soviet influence and Eisenhower believed this threat justified a more active role in the Middle East.

While at least verbal support of Israel continued, Eisenhower cultivated a favorable relationship with Nasser of Egypt in order to increase American influence with Arab states. Nasser was the recognized leader of the Arab League and the instigator of the "Pan-Arab Movement" aimed at creating a union of Arab states. Such a union would resist outside control from either east or west. While he had several rivals during his lifetime, no single Arab was better situated than Nasser to create good relations between the United States and the Middle East. 24

One of the first issues Eisenhower faced was the situation in Iran. For the previous two years, Mossadeq had served as Prime Minister and the standoff between the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and his government continued. Fear of a communist

takeover led the U.S. to conclude that the Shah represented the only real source of stability in Iran and that Mossadeq had to go. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and the CIA's Middle East specialist, Kermit Roosevelt, informed Eisenhower of a plan for Mossadeq's overthrow. The British had originally devised the plan and the U.S. needed their help. The plan called for the Shah to fire Mossadeq and replace him with Fazollah Zahedi, who, unlike his predecessor, would follow closely the directives of the monarch. He would also agree to a compromise with the A.I.O.C. and crack down on the communist Tudeh party.\(^{25}\)

Called "Operation Ajax," Roosevelt put the plan in motion in August 1953. Some aspects did not go smoothly, such as riots in support of Mossadeq, who refused to be fired. The Shah fled the country for a few days while tanks cruised the streets, but after the CIA organized riots against Mossadeq, the Prime Minister finally surrendered and the Shah returned. Naturally, the U.S. denied any involvement in the coup, but most Iranians recognized the American role in the events of August 1953, viewing it as just another example of western imperialism. Eisenhower did not understand this at the time and felt he had saved an important outpost of containment from Soviet infiltration and intervention.\(^{26}\) American oil companies also wrote themselves into the Iranian Oil Consortium after the coup, thus ending Britain's last, uncontested foothold in the industry.

While Eisenhower focused mostly on the situation in Iran, he also hoped to forge an Arab-Israeli peace. David Ben-Gurion, founder of Israel and its first Prime Minister,

\(^{25}\) See Goode, *In the Shadow of Musadiq*.

stepped down from his post in 1953 and handed the reigns of power to Moshe Sharett. While both men were members of the leading MAPAI or labor party and possessed a similar political orientation, they differed in their approach to Arab neighbors. Both leaders agreed that military strength was vital to state security, but Sharett advocated some negotiation and accommodation with Arab states. He was not willing to sacrifice Israeli security, but believed that the defeated Arab states would be willing to accommodate Israel at least to some degree, and would work to prevent another war. Ben-Gurion, on the other hand, advocated military incursions and reprisals on Arabs in order to preserve and expand Israel's armistice lines. He, like the right-wing Zionist Zeev Jabotinsky, believed in erecting an "iron wall" between Israel and its enemies through military expansion and force, rather than negotiations. Sharett would succeed in moderating this approach only briefly.

Events in Egypt also encouraged Eisenhower's hopes for an Arab-Israeli peace initiative. Nasser became premier in April 1954 and proclaimed his vision of "positive neutrality" wherein Middle East states could create true independence for themselves from either side of the Cold War. This meant good relations with both the Soviet Union and the United States, but Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles hoped to attract Nasser toward the west and into peace negotiations with Israel. If they could produce such a peace, it would stabilize the region and prevent Soviet incursions there.

In late 1954, The United States began to jointly plan a secret peace initiative with Great Britain. Called "Project Alpha," the plan was to secretly guarantee Israel's borders


28 Shlaim, The Iron Wall, 14-16.
if it would, in exchange, make some territorial adjustments and repatriate some Arab
refugees. The peace overture also included plans for a water-sharing agreement, an end to
the Arab boycott on Israel, and substantial economic and military incentives to Nasser. In
fact, secret, back-channel talks between Egypt and Israel had been going on since 1952
and both sides seemed willing to make some concessions. However, by the time the U.S.
and Britain presented their plan to Israel in February 1955, Ben-Gurion had returned to
power as activists became disillusioned with Sharett's peace making. Israel would not
agree with repatriation and western diplomats failed to recognize that Israel was not
interested in giving up any land in exchange for peace.29

While the Alpha project proceeded, Britain also developed a plan for a security
alliance for the region called the Baghdad Pact (to replace the defunct MEC or MEDO
plan). First formed in February 1955, it created a military alliance between Iraq and
Turkey, which Britain joined in April. Britain had been particularly eager to create the
alliance because its agreement for military bases in Iraq was about to expire. Almost
immediately, Egypt, Syria, and Jordan voiced hostility toward the Baghdad Pact. Nasser,
young King Hussein of Jordan, and Syrian President Shukri al-Quwatli found it difficult
to see the Soviets as a threat to their security. Nasser viewed the pact as a veiled effort by
the west to continue its imperialistic hold over the region. He also feared that the western
powers supported Iraq as leader of the Arab world, a position Nasser craved for
himself.30 No Arab countries other than Iraq joined the pact and the U.S. decided to stay

29 Shimon Shamir, "The Collapse of Project Alpha," in W. Roger Louis and Roger Owen, editors,
30 See Nigel John Ashton, "The High Jacking of a Pact: The Formation of the Baghdad Pact and
1993): 123-37; Ayesha Jalal, "Towards the Baghdad Pact: South Asia and Middle East Defense in the Cold
Baghdad Pact: Cold War or Colonialism?" Middle Eastern Studies 27 (January 1991): 140-56.
out of it to preserve some chance at better relations with Nasser. Any real chance for the Alpha Project was now over. The following year, more tension between Israel and Egypt erupted as Israel launched an attack called Operation Black Arrow on Egyptian military installations in the Gaza Strip, ostensibly in response to ongoing raids by Egyptian-trained guerrillas or Fedeyeen (Arabic for “those who sacrifice self”) fighters.31

To make matters worse, Nasser attended a conference of non-aligned countries in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955. The Egyptian President emerged as the leading figure of this group, making the United States more pessimistic than ever about its standing with Egypt.32 Then Nasser concluded a huge arms deal with Czechoslovakia in September. While at the Bandung Conference, he had requested military aid from China to counter increasing violence from Israel.33 China suggested that Nasser obtain such aid from the Soviets. Nasser made the deal with the Soviets (via Czechoslovakia), giving them their first significant foothold in the Middle East in virtual defiance of the Baghdad Pact or any other western containment efforts. In 1957, Syria would also purchase Soviet weapons.

In order to counter Soviet gains, Dulles and Eisenhower began discussing plans to help build the proposed Aswan Dam. Nasser needed assistance for the project and the British urged the United States to get involved. British Prime Minister Anthony Eden hoped that western support for the dam would stop the Soviets from developing further inroads in Egypt. If funding did not come from the west, he feared, the Soviets would

31 For an excellent overview of Eisenhower’s policy toward Israel, see Alteras, Eisenhower and Israel.
32 Kaufman, The Arab Middle East and the United States, 22.
33 Alteras, Eisenhower and Israel, 140-141.
certainly offer it. Dulles also hoped to salvage the Alpha initiative by linking American funding for the Aswan Dam to some kind of accommodation with Israel.

Plans to build a high Dam on the Nile had been in process for several years, and Nasser made the project part of his platform when he moved to the forefront in Egypt. The dam would control devastating flooding, generate millions of watts of electricity, permit irrigation, and create jobs for Egyptians. The U.S. liked the project because it was non-military and would demonstrate humanitarian concerns, rather than imperialistic ones. The plan involved a grant to Egypt of around $56 million, with $200 million in loans to follow. Nasser proudly brandished the project to his people as an example of what "positive neutralism" could do for Egypt and perhaps the Arab world as a whole. Through careful negotiation and an assertion of neutrality, Nasser was obtaining weapons from one side of the Cold War struggle and financing for the dam from the other.34

While negotiations for the Aswan dam continued, the U.S. again attempted to broker peace between Egypt and Israel. In January 1956, Robert Anderson, a former Secretary of the Navy and Deputy Secretary of Defense, went to Egypt to negotiate with Nasser concerning what was called the Gamma Project. Anderson offered the Egyptians a massive aid package and a plan to fund the resettlement of the refugees in Arab countries in exchange for peace. He even offered Nasser a plan for the construction of a bridge over the Gulf of Aqaba to join Egypt and Saudi Arabia. Anderson shuttled between Cairo and Tel Aviv, hoping to create movement toward peace talk, but both Ben-Gurion and Nasser balked at Anderson’s attempt. Nasser feared he would risk assassination if he met with Ben-Gurion—a fear later born out by the fate of another Egyptian president, Anwar

34 Brands, Into the Labyrinth, 60-61.
Sadat. Ben-Gurion was determined not to give up territory or agree to any repatriation of Arab refugees. Thus the Anderson Mission died, forcing a re-evaluation of U.S. policy.  

On the collapse of Project Gamma, both the United States and Britain came to view Nasser not as a possible ally, but as a problem to be contained. Dulles believed he needed to teach Nasser a lesson by delaying funding for the Aswan Dam and other economic aid packages. In a new approach called the Omega policy, Eisenhower decided to penalize Nasser for his cooperation with the Soviets, and to "build up some other individual as a prospective leader of the Arab world." The British added to Eisenhower's anger in a report from its Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). Eden asserted that his agents had found evidence that Nasser was planning to overthrow the traditional monarchies in the region. Eisenhower listened to the report with some worry, but hoped Britain would not overreact.

Nasser further angered the west by constantly criticizing the Baghdad Pact, concluding a military alliance with Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Yemen, and then granting diplomatic recognition to communist China. Faced with opposition in Congress to American funding of the Aswan dam, Dulles withdrew the offer in July 1956. He and Eisenhower had hoped that economic assistance and the dam project would encourage Nasser to negotiate peace with Israel and refrain from purchasing weapons from the Soviet bloc. In both cases, the plan failed.

Determined to finance the dam project and send an important message about his independence from outside powers, Nasser nationalized the Suez Canal Company. Since

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35 Hahn, The United States, Great Britain, and Egypt, 195-97.
37 Dulles to Embassy in Egypt, April 30, 1953, FRUS, 15:363-364.
three-fourths of all European oil passed through the canal, the British had been looking for an excuse to oppose Nasser. Eden did not think the Egyptians had the training to operate the canal effectively and he hoped to regain British bases abandoned per a 1954 agreement.

For the next several months, Israel and France held secret talks about the matter, later including Britain. Angry at his support of rebels in Algeria, the French disliked Nasser as much as the British did. Israel was concerned about growing Egyptian military strength after the Czech arms deal. Military leaders such as Moshe Dayan were eager to create a war with Egypt before Nasser had fully absorbed the new weapons. Thus motivated, Britain, France, and Israel created an elaborate plan to overthrow Nasser. Britain and France would issue warnings to both sides that the canal must remain open and free from an Arab-Israeli conflict. Israel would then invade the Sinai, drawing Egypt into battle. Pretending concern for the canal, the British and French would bomb Egyptian airfields, seize the canal, and cut off and destroy Egyptian forces in the Sinai desert.

In late October 1956, Israel put the plan in motion by attacking and quickly destroying Egyptian forces in the Sinai desert. Britain and France issued a warning, which Nasser ignored as expected. Bombing began and a few days later, British and French forces seized the upper quarter of the canal. Nasser, in response, sank ships to block the canal, rendering it unusable. Greatly upset by this intervention, most world opinion lined up against the British-French-Israeli action, and both the United States and

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the Soviet Union called for a cease-fire and withdrawal. Eisenhower feared Soviet involvement if the crisis did not soon end in Nasser's favor.39 He also regretted that the intervention deflected world attention away from another crisis in Hungary in which the Soviet Union brutally suppressed a popular liberation movement in Budapest. Not only did the world largely ignore events in Hungary, but also British and French action in Egypt looked little different from Soviet behavior in Hungary. The Suez intervention made western powers look no less imperialistic than the Soviets.

The Suez Crisis severely strained the western Alliance. Eisenhower eventually resorted to blocking British access to International Monetary Fund (IMF) money needed to stabilize the pound. The Suez crisis had stimulated a run on British reserves, so they needed loans. The U.S. persuaded the IMF to require British withdrawal from Egypt before granting the money. Under this condition and the pressure of world opinion, Britain and France began withdrawal on November 7 and left completely in late December. Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip and Sharm al-Shaykh, but not until March 1957.40

Convinced that offers of aid would not win over Nasser, Dulles and Eisenhower tried another approach. The President and his advisors called a policy statement of January 5, 1957 the "Eisenhower Doctrine." This declaration provided $200 million per year for aid to Middle East countries as well as blanket authority to use armed forces to

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In February 1958, Egypt and Syria formed the United Arab Republic (U.A.R.). Nasser had long talked of pan-Arabism, carefully positioning himself as the leader of any such movement. He argued that only a new union of Arab states would be able to become a strong, regional power and resist western or Soviet imperialism. True independence, unity against Israel, and neutrality in the Cold War would be the achievements of pan-Arabism. Although Syria actually initiated the union to solve internal instability, Israel immediately suspected that Nasser had forced Syria into the alliance.\footnote{Abba Eban, \textit{Personal Witness: Israel Through My Eyes} (NY: G. P. Putnum's Sons, 1992): 290.} Eisenhower also envisioned an alliance that might threaten Israel and the pro-western states of Iran, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon, and the unstable regime in Jordan.

His fears were validated when Iraq experienced a coup in July 1958 that resulted in execution of the Hashemite King Faisal, the crown prince, and Prime Minister, Nuri al-Said. The new republican government, under the leadership of Abd al-Karim Qasim, closely allied itself with the Iraqi Communist Party for support against a large group of Nasserists in the country. Although the alliance represented a political expedient for Qasim and no more, Dulles saw it as a threat. To make matters worse, Iraq quickly

withdrew from the Baghdad Pact. The alliance had lost its only Arab member and was less likely than ever to be an effective barrier to Soviet penetration.

In response to the coup in Iraq, Hussein of Jordan and President Camile Chamoun of Lebanon requested support from the west. Both rulers feared that Nasser’s wave of Arab unity would quickly swallow them. The U.S. and Britain agreed to step in and protect these two loyal regimes, theoretically putting the Eisenhower Doctrine into practice. In July 1958 the U.S. sent in Marines to prop up Chamoun’s shaky, anti-Nasser regime in Lebanon (Chamoun attempted to succeed himself in violation of Lebanese law), warned the Saudis that Nasser was a tool of the communists, and reinforced its support of an unpopular royal government in Iran. The British simultaneously flew troops to Jordan to stabilize the country. Both Britain and the United States withdrew their forces in November, after their respective rulers appeared able to hold onto power. King Hussein visited the United States the following year, signaling to Nasser that the Americans wanted to see the Hashemites retain control of Jordan.

Ironically, the Iraqi coup influenced the U.S. to have second thoughts about Nasser, who now had begun to appear less radical than Qasim. Eisenhower tried once more to draw the Egyptian leader closer to the west through a program known as Public Law 480 that sold surplus wheat at a nominal cost to foreign countries. At the same time, Eisenhower continued to keep Israel at a distance. Its participation in the Suez crisis and reluctance to withdraw from Sinai, among other things, kept Israel from winning the broad-spectrum, military support it wanted from the United States.

45Dallas, King Hussein, 80-84.
46Heikal, Cairo Documents, 189-190.
The outcome of the Suez Conflict directly affected Israeli politics. Although Ben-Gurion did not accomplish such aims as toppling Nasser and expanding Israel's borders, he succeeded in defeating any remaining power of Moshe Sharett and the moderates. After Suez, the activists (including future Prime Minister Menachem Begin) remained firmly in control of Israeli politics for the next several decades. Ben-Gurion became more convinced than ever that territorial expansion was the only way to security, although pressure from the Americans and other nations continued to restrain Israeli policy. Israeli Foreign Minister (and later prime minister) Golda Meir later recalled her anger at the United States for refusing to offer security guarantees after the Israeli withdrawal from the Sinai after 1956. She called Dulles "that cold, hard gray man." The future deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Abba Eban blamed the entire Suez crisis on the fact that the U.S. refused to supply Israel with "a minimal jet force." Israel continued to feel neglected while American support of Egypt during the Suez crisis encouraged Nasser.

Eisenhower presided over a major turning point in U.S. relations with the Middle East. In the wake of the Suez Crisis, British influence waned while the United States filled the void. On some issues, the British and United States cooperated well. Plans and implementation of Project Alpha, itself a failure, was an example of good cooperation with the British. This relationship, however, declined dramatically with British participation in the Suez crisis in 1956. During the unrest of 1958, both countries

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47 Meir, My Life, 306.
48 Eban, Personal Witness, 286.
cooperated as they stabilized Lebanon and Jordan. It had become obvious, however, that the British era in the Middle East was coming to an end.49

Relations with Nasser proved to be difficult as he played one superpower against the other to achieve his own goals. Even King Hussein of Jordan and the Shah of Iran managed to obtain increasing amounts of American aid by playing on American fears of communism. Israel formed its policies often in defiance of U.S. pressure and direction. Eisenhower's primary failure in the region was his inability to recognize the true motives of these regional players outside of the context of American policy.

Although John F. Kennedy represented a “new generation,” he also inherited the policies of his predecessors toward the Middle East. Yet, during his career as congressman and senator, Kennedy had exhibited differences from Eisenhower. He had traveled to Palestine in 1939 and 1951 and went on record in 1952 for increasing American aid to Israel. He admired the creators of the Jewish state and applauded Truman for his recognition of Israel in 1948. In his campaign for the presidency in 1959, Kennedy addressed the B’nai Zion group at their golden anniversary banquet in New York, remarking that “Israel, embodying all the characteristics of a western democracy...shares with the west a tradition of civil liberties, of cultural freedom.”

Because of his clear admiration for the State of Israel, he garnered strong Jewish-American support for his election, including the fund-raising efforts of Abraham Feinberg, chair of the American Bank and Trust Company of New York.

Yet, Kennedy also admired Arab nationalism and Nasser in particular. He had often argued, regrettably, that other nations saw the west as a colonial power in the Middle East. In a speech in La Grande, Oregon in 1959, Kennedy argued that the United States “tended to deal with this area almost exclusively in the context of the east-west struggle” and that “issues of nationalism, of economic development, and local political

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hostilities were dismissed by our policy-makers as being of secondary importance." He also criticized American backing of unrepresentative and unpopular regimes. While Kennedy clearly wished to distance himself from both Truman and Eisenhower, he did not always clarify what he proposed to do. In the speech in Oregon, Kennedy declared "we will never turn our back on our steadfast friends in Israel, whose adherence to the democratic way must be admired by all friends of freedom." Kennedy wanted relationships with all sides in the region, a set of circumstances he would find impossible to accomplish.

In spite of Kennedy's statements in support of Israel, Nasser had a favorable opinion of the new President and recalled the latter's criticism of French colonialism in Algeria as a reason for hope for a better relationship. Kennedy had in his cabinet such people as Secretary of State Dean Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, National Security Advisor, who favored an improved relationship with Arab states. Bundy relied heavily upon the advice of his top aide, Robert Komer, who held similar views. Komer had served fifteen years in the CIA and now brought his extensive experience to the National Security Council. He would later serve as Lyndon Johnson's special assistant for Vietnam. Known for speaking his mind, Komer provided a strong voice for restricting aid to Middle East leaders who did not make efforts to reform and become self-reliant. He also frequently urged Kennedy to force Israel to make concessions to its neighbors and the Arab refugees.

Phillips Talbot, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and

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5 Heikal, Cairo Documents, 201.
South Asian Affairs, and John Badeau, Kennedy's ambassador to Egypt, were also strong
supporters of closer ties with the Arabs. All Kennedy's advisors, however, agreed that
they must maintain a careful balance between Israel and the Arab states and that it was
critical to avoid close alliance with either side.7

Conversely, Kennedy's Vice President, Lyndon Johnson, maintained a close
relationship with Israeli lobby groups and White House legal counsel Myer Feldman was
directly connected to the American-Jewish community. In fact, both sides of the Arab-
Israeli conflict held high hopes for the Kennedy administration and it was scarcely
surprising that one side or both would end up disappointed.

Kennedy and Economic Development

As early as 1956, Kennedy outlined in a speech to a Zionist organization in
Baltimore what he believed were the major issues in the Middle East. Speaking in
response to the Suez Crisis, he balanced his speech between Arab and Israeli concerns.
Among the issues he identified were the rise of Arab nationalism, access to oil, the Suez
Canal, Soviet penetration into the region, the growing leadership of Egypt, and the
security of Israel. One point especially important to Kennedy was economic development,
a theme that would dominate Kennedy's approach to the "third world" in general during
his presidency.8 He often spoke of the need to rectify a past filled with "poverty and
illiteracy and disease and underdevelopment" by using western resources.9

7 Teresa Ann Thomas, "From Orientalism to Professionalism: United States Foreign Service
Officers in the Middle East Since 1946." Ph.D. Dissertation, Clark University, 1996.
8 Kennedy, Speech to The Histadrut Zionist Organization, Baltimore, Maryland, November 27,
9 See also Thomas Patterson, "John F. Kennedy and the World," in Richard J. Snyder, editor, John
The keystone to Kennedy’s proposals for the Middle East during his career in the Senate was the concept of a "Middle East Regional Resources Fund," run by the UN and the World Bank. He introduced this idea in Cleveland in 1957 and referred to it often in subsequent speeches.¹⁰ He envisioned such a fund supporting development of the Jordan River and other water sources, resettlement projects for refugees, and the development of nuclear energy. Kennedy’s vision of the Arab world projected a backward region, plagued with underdevelopment and poverty. He wanted to encourage social and economic development that would lead to democratic politics.¹¹

References to Israel, however, were much the opposite. Kennedy compared the young state to the American west and the Israelis to the rugged Americans who finally "tamed" the mountains, deserts, and Indians on the American continent.¹² He also argued that the existence of Israel was not the cause of all the trouble in the Middle East. Even though Kennedy would present himself as pro-Arab during his years in the Senate, he filled his speeches on the campaign trail with words of support and admiration for Israel that reduced Arab states to primitives by comparison.

The young senator from Massachusetts did discuss the subject that would become both the focal point of his plan for peace in the region and the one sticking point he would experience with Israel: the Arab refugees. He argued in several speeches that until the refugees resettled, repatriated, or both, there would be no peace. He criticized the Eisenhower administration’s focus on military alliances (referring to the Baghdad Pact),

arguing that the region needed development, not military assistance. He clearly distanced himself from Eisenhower's policies, especially in the wake of the much-criticized intervention in Lebanon in 1958. He also criticized the American withdrawal from the High Dam project in a speech to the Wisconsin Democratic Convention in November 1959. He argued that such action opened the door for the Soviets to finance the dam. He called for a redirection of American foreign policy and again for a Development Loan Fund.

Although he did not develop the label "New Frontier" until later, Kennedy created the framework for what would become the cornerstone of his foreign policy as president. Most of Kennedy's "New Frontier" policies would be domestic, but a major innovation that would focus on the foreign "frontier" was the Peace Corps. In an effort to aid "third world" nations, Kennedy wanted to send thousands of volunteers to provide programs in health, education, rural development, and government services. In his inaugural address, Kennedy stated:

To those people in the huts and villages of half the globe struggling to break the bonds of mass misery, we pledge our best efforts to help them help themselves, for whatever period is required—not because the communists may be doing it, not because we seek their votes, but because it is right. If a free society cannot help the many who are poor, it cannot save the few who are rich.

While the work of the Peace Corps would be most notable in Africa and Latin America, it also included groups sent to Iran and Turkey. The principles of self-help and economic improvement became the bedrock of Kennedy's policy toward the Middle East.

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13 Ibid., 120-122.
The decline of the British Empire after World War II meant that the United States would fill the void. Yet, even though British influence in the Middle East was not as strong as in the past, Kennedy felt inclined to cooperate with Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. The British had angered Eisenhower during the Suez Crisis, but it had supported American actions in 1958 and the relationship improved. Kennedy and Macmillan met for the first time in March 1961 and they instantly liked each other. In spite of frequent differences of opinion and approach to the Middle East, the two leaders admired and respected each other. Kennedy valued Macmillan’s advice and found his experience valuable and even comforting.

Truman and Eisenhower approached the Middle East with the assumption that superpower status would enable them to influence Middle East leaders, especially since the region had long been within the western sphere of influence. American presidents began to learn the limits of power as Nasser, the Shah of Iran, David Ben-Gurion, King Hussein, and others cooperated only when their goals coincided with western aims. When they did not, American policy-makers felt frustrated and threatened. Giving money, withdrawing it, or threatening intervention became the primary policy tools to control regional leaders. Kennedy wanted to use power in a more gentle way, through economic development untied from policy agendas. His plan for the Middle East would be a departure from both his predecessors. Yet, he also believed that American power could direct the actions of “third world” leaders. Surely, he argued, good example and economic aid for self-development would stimulate democratic reform and place the Middle East firmly on the western side of the Cold War struggle.

John F. Kennedy designed his development policy for the Middle East to stimulate moderate reform, prevent unrest and radicalism. This strategy meant
encouragement for the various states to modernize their economies and move toward representative government and other democratic reforms. U.S. policy-makers assumed that democracy and modern technology could "liberate" the Third World from its backward and dependent state, as well as ensure it did not fall under Soviet sway. While Eisenhower had been willing to use large sums of American dollars to keep such countries as Iran and Jordan within the western camp, Kennedy hoped to make them more self-reliant and willing partners through shared values and democratic systems.\textsuperscript{16}

Much of the young, educated sector of regional societies initially shared this goal with Kennedy. Such individuals, particularly in Egypt, Syria, and Iran, believed that constitutionalism and democratic liberties were the route to a better future. The rise of leaders such as Mossadeq in Iran and Nasser in Egypt laid the foundation for change and now they needed the help of the United States to achieve these goals. They waited, and when another young intellectual became the American president, their hopes mounted. While his predecessors had been fearful of Arab nationalism and its unknown implications for U.S. interests, Kennedy claimed to view it with understanding.\textsuperscript{17}

The young president's goal was to fight the Cold War by supporting developing nations in ways that would cost less and perhaps yield better results. He viewed Eisenhower and Dulles's "brinkmanship" as unnecessarily risky and hoped for better cooperation with the Soviet Union. Although crises in Cuba (the ultimate brinkmanship) and Berlin would divert his attention, what Kennedy really wanted to accomplish was the

\textsuperscript{16} Although it focuses primarily upon domestic policy, one of the best articulations of Kennedy's "New Frontier" is found in Irving Bernstein, Promises Kept: John F. Kennedy's New Frontier (NY: Oxford University Press, 1991).

revitalization of the U.S. relationship with developing countries in Latin America, Africa, and the Middle East. He believed that Third-World nationalism did not have to be anti-American if the U.S. would assist these countries in their quest for economic and political independence and modernization.

Kennedy was not alone in his cultivation of the Third World. Soviet premier Nikita Khruschev had recently expressed his support of national liberation in Third World countries and supported such leaders as Patrice Lumumba in the Congo, Fidel Castro of Cuba, and, of course, Nasser of Egypt.18 Kennedy responded to this Soviet effort with the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress.

To further counter Khrushchev's efforts, Kennedy created what some have called a "two-pronged approach," but was really a three-pronged plan for the Middle East.19 First, he wanted to make sure that the relationship with traditional regimes, such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel, was solid and remained so. He intended to encourage monarchies toward democratic and fiscal reforms to thwart unrest and popular revolution or communist activity. One of the tools was large grants of aid in his "Food for Peace" program. Public Law 480 allowed the President to provide large amounts of American surplus foodstuffs to developing countries.20 Second, he hoped to attract Nasser and other non-aligned countries into a closer relationship with the U.S., again in order to prevent Soviet inroads in the region. Third, he intended to bring about a

19 Mordechai Gazit, President Kennedy's Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel (Tel Aviv: Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1983): 30.
20 Principles and Criteria - Public Law 480, Presidential Office Files (POF), Box 281, and Memorandum for the President, October 10, 1961, POF Box 78, John F. Kennedy Library (JFKL), Boston, MA.
settlement on the "Arab refugee" issue, in order to create the basis for peace between
Israel and its Arab neighbors. During the Palestine war in 1948 and 49, nearly 500,000
Arabs living in Palestine were displaced and living in refugee camps in the West Bank
and Gaza Strip. Only after solving this divisive issue, he believed, would serious peace
talks be possible.21

Israel and Its Nuclear Plant

Although the Suez Crisis created tension between the U.S. and Israel, Kennedy
intended to keep the relationship strong. He and Prime Minister Ben-Gurion respected
each other, the latter finding the American President knowledgeable about the Middle
East.22 Kennedy also intended to be tough with Israel and push toward better cooperation
on use of the Jordan River and, most importantly, the refugee problem. Before he dealt
with any of these key issues at any length, Kennedy had to address the recent revelation
that Israel was developing nuclear reactors.23 This fact, and the expected Arab response,
would make negotiating the high wire between U.S.-Israeli relations and U.S.-Arab
relations all the more difficult.

A key component of Kennedy's approach to the Third World was his strong
interest in the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons. His support for a Test Ban Treaty
between the U.S. and Soviet Union was part of this commitment, which he hoped would
help control the spread of nuclear technology. In a briefing with the Secretaries of State

21 Douglas Little, "From Even-Handed to Empty-Handed: Seeking Order in the Middle East," in
22 Moshe Pearlman, Ben Gurion Looks Back: In Talks with Moshe Pearlman (NY: Simon and
and Defense before his inauguration, one of the first questions Kennedy asked was about nuclear capabilities in other countries. They told him that both India and Israel had such knowledge and that Israel might be able to produce enough plutonium for weapons by 1963. Outgoing Secretary of State Christian Herter advised Kennedy to check into the Dimona nuclear plant in Israel and insist on inspection as soon as possible.24

Early in his administration, Kennedy's advisors held talks with their counterparts in Britain about the Arab-Israeli problem and specifically, the Dimona plant. In this conversation, the British asked what Kennedy intended to do about it. The State Department assured the British that they intended to insist on inspections and promised to share any information they received. Both sides agreed to continue impressing upon the Israelis the seriousness of the matter, in their views.25 Later in March, the British recommended that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) conduct inspections of the Dimona reactor. The problem was getting Israel to agree with such inspections and the State Department thanked Britain for its opinion, but stated that it thought the U.S. had a better chance of getting the Israelis to agree to an ad hoc inspection than did the IAEA. The British acquiesced and the State Department went forward with its plans accordingly.26

The United States had helped Israel develop its first nuclear reactor in 1955 under the "Atoms for Peace" program. American engineers designed this reactor for power generation only, but, in 1960, the U.S. learned that Israel had been secretly building

24 Cohen, Dean Rusk, 101.
26 Rusk to the British Embassy, March 29, 1962, FRUS, 17:554-556.

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another reactor at Dimona in the Negev desert.\textsuperscript{27} The Senate Foreign Relations Committee began heatedly discussing this information in January 1961. At first, Israel insisted that the project was to be a textile factory, and later a metallurgic plant. When it became clear that it was a nuclear power plant, the U.S. became angry, especially because Israel had lied about the site. Israel hurried to reassure Kennedy and Congress that the site was for peaceful purposes only, that it had no plan to develop nuclear weapons. The Israelis even indicated a willingness to have the structure inspected, but only after publicity over the discovery of the reactor died down.\textsuperscript{28}

After further discussion with Israel, Kennedy learned that France had partially funded the Dimona facility, provided the necessary uranium, and received all plutonium produced. Israel displayed some reticence after the discovery of the reactor. A few weeks later, Israel complained about American insistence on inspection, arguing that other countries known to have nuclear capabilities faced no such demand. Israel would agree to inspection when the U.S. applied the same scrutiny to other countries.\textsuperscript{29}

Interestingly, Kennedy was not quite as upset over the Dimona project as Congress seemed to be. He had conversations with Foreign Minister Golda Meir, who falsely told him that she had learned of the reactor only when the information hit the press. Kennedy thus could blame Ben-Gurion for the secrecy and continue to deal comfortably with Meir. He also believed Israeli assurances that it intended the reactor only for power generation. Secrecy had been necessary because of expected Arab


\textsuperscript{28} Memorandum of Conversation, January 9, 1961, FRUS, 17:2; and William Macomber to Executive Director of the Joint Congressional Committee on Atomic Energy (Ramey), January 19, 1961, FRUS, 17:4.

\textsuperscript{29} Summary of Additional Recent Information on Israeli Atomic Energy Program, January 17, 1961, FRUS, 17:5-6.
reaction. Kennedy suggested that the entire situation be downplayed in order to keep Arab states from using the news as an excuse to attack Israel. Congress agreed, but in order to do this Israel would have to agree to an inspection in the near future.\(^\text{30}\)

Ben-Gurion, however, was very reluctant to have U.S. inspectors and for good reason. He believed, to the point of obsession, that the only way to insure security and continued expansion of Israel was through developing nuclear weapons.\(^\text{31}\) In spite of assurances to the contrary, it became clear that Ben-Gurion did intend from the beginning for the Dimona reactor to eventually produce nuclear weapons. For this plan to work, he would have to shield the truth from the outside as long as possible. He even kept the information from his own advisors and from the Knesset. Although Moshe Sharett and others would argue that nuclear weapons would only make Israel less secure, Ben-Gurion refused to settle for anything less than nuclear capability.\(^\text{32}\)

When Kennedy and the rest of the world found out that the Dimona plant existed, Ben-Gurion tried very hard to avoid inspection. He used as an excuse the ongoing political turmoil over the so-called "Lavon Affair."\(^\text{33}\) In 1955, party leaders forced Pinhas Lavon, Minister of Defense, from office because Egyptian authorities had uncovered information on an Israeli sabotage operation. The previous year, Israeli military intelligence had launched a series of espionage activities inside Egypt, hoping to postpone the scheduled British evacuation of their bases in the Suez Canal Zone. First, agents set off a series of bombs in mailboxes at American libraries and information offices. They

\(^{30}\) Memorandum of Conversation, Ogden Reid and Kennedy, January 31, 1961, FRUS, 17:11; and Macomber to Ramey, January 19, 1961, FRUS, 17:3.

\(^{31}\) Avi Shlaim, The Iron Wall, 204-206.


\(^{33}\) Memorandum of Conversation, Jones and Harman, February 3, 1961, POF Box 119a, JFKL.
then attempted to set off bombs at cinemas that were showing western films, but one bomb went off prematurely and led to the capture of the agents.\textsuperscript{34}

 Israeli intelligence intended their actions to persuade western nations that they could not trust Nasser's government to run the canal. Officers in charge of the spy ring claimed that orders had come directly from Lavon, with no higher government approval. When Lavon proclaimed his innocence, Prime Minister Moshe Sharret appointed a committee to investigate. The results were inconclusive, but the affair ended the political careers of both Lavon and Sharret. Ben-Gurion then came out of retirement (he had left the government in late 1953) and once again became Prime Minister in November 1955.\textsuperscript{35}

 In 1960, Lavon brought his case back to Ben-Gurion and demanded his exoneration. Ben-Gurion refused, arguing that only a court of law could do that. Lavon took his case to the Knesset. This body eventually appointed a "committee of seven" who declared Lavon innocent. Ben Gurion was very angry, arguing that the committee had not based their judgment on any evidence. He resigned in protest, which forced new elections and chaos in Israeli politics. Later, Ben-Gurion would continue to press the issue, calling for more investigations, and considering anyone who opposed his efforts as a personal enemy.\textsuperscript{36}

 Although the Knesset refused to accept the resignation and Ben-Gurion remained in power, Israel was not eager to allow inspection of the Dimona Reactor in the midst of such political turmoil. After much pressure, both sides agreed to an inspection on May 18, 1961. The report by the American scientists was encouraging--that the purpose of the Dimona plant was research and power generation. They also agreed that the Israeli need

\textsuperscript{34} Shlaim, \textit{The Iron Wall}, 111-112.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid., 120-122; Aba Eban, \textit{Aba Eban: An Autobiography} (NY: Random House, 1977): 292-293.
for secrecy was understandable because of the Arab boycott and fear of further retaliation. 37 The scientists recommended a second visit the following year and did caution the U.S. that the plant would be operational by 1964 and capable of producing plutonium. Ben-Gurion assured Kennedy that he did not intend to use plutonium for weapons. He failed to mention (and inspectors saw no evidence) that a large, underground reprocessing plant for producing plutonium was even then under construction.38

During this and later American inspections of the Dimona plant, Israelis were careful to limit the time inspectors actually had to take measurements and readings. The visits usually started with lectures and demonstrations of scientific research that limited the time the inspectors would actually have to look at the facility. The Israelis did not allow them to bring their own measuring instruments, to take photographs, or to talk to any of the employees. In this environment, it was easy to keep the inspectors away from evidence that might incriminate the Israelis.39

France also reassured Kennedy when it admitted to helping Israel with the Dimona project since 1961. France claimed that it had set very strict limits on the agreement to build only one reactor of 40 megawatts, and provide approximately 385 tons of natural uranium between 1960 and 1970. While Israel had promised to return all plutonium produced from the first shipment of 85 tons of French uranium, no such agreement covered the entire 385 tons scheduled for delivery over the next decade. This disparity gave Kennedy reason to keep close watch on the Dimona Reactor and to hold Israel to its promises. He feared that Israel might obtain uranium from such other

37 Rusk to Kennedy, May 5, 1961, National Security Files (NSF) Box 118, JFKL; and Battle to Bundy, May 26, 1961, FRUS, 17:125-127.
countries as Argentina, which might not place such tight restrictions on the plutonium produced.  

As Kennedy tried to grapple with the Dimona issue, a report prepared by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, probably in mid-Summer 1961, reached his desk. The Chiefs affirmed the suspicion that Israel was in fact attempting to purchase unrestricted uranium from Argentina, and that there were no laws to prevent its use for weapons. It also reported that the U.A.R. had been conducting nuclear research under a 1956 agreement with the Soviet Union. Although research indicated no current threat, it suggested a possible one in the future. The report also stated that although the Chiefs did not expect Israel to actually use nuclear weapons, it might threaten use of them as a psychological weapon against the Arab states. The Joint Chiefs warned that Egyptian reaction to the Dimona issue might include various economic sanctions or a blockade of the Suez Canal. They further predicted that Nasser would request a nuclear capability to counter any weapons developed by Israel, and that the USSR likely would grant this request. Furthermore, Russia might use the Dimona situation to break off test ban talks.

The Joint Chiefs concluded that Kennedy must discourage Israel from any future production of nuclear weapons in order to prevent proliferation in the Middle East. Other countries such as Switzerland and Sweden were contemplating nuclear development and might see American acquiescence with Israel's program as tacit permission. The Defense Department perceived the Dimona issue as a complicating factor in U.S.-Israeli

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38 Only unofficial reports of the Dimona inspection exist in the files. The official inspection report has not been found; see FRUS, vol. 17, 126 n.1 and Cohen, *Israel and the Bomb*, 106.
40 Unsigned Report, no date, POF Box 119a, JFKL.
41 Joint Chiefs of Staff, "A Strategic Analysis of the Impact of the Acquisition by Israel of a Nuclear Capability," undated, FRUS, 17:216-221.
42 Ibid., 218-219.
relations, but State was satisfied with Israeli assurances that it planned to use the plant only for peaceful purposes. A cautious Kennedy planned for regular inspections of the plant by neutral observers, as suggested by Ben-Gurion.43

To further complicate the relationship, Israel began requesting an increase in weapons sales at the outset of the Kennedy administration. One of the first reports the President received on Israel came from the outgoing Ambassador Ogden R. Reid. He asserted that the hostility of the U.A.R. and the proximity of Damascus, the Syrian capital, made Israel vulnerable. Reid suggested that Israel be given ballistic missiles and "specific assurances of our willingness to help in case of invasion..." because of this threat.44 A month later, Kennedy met with the Israeli ambassador, Avraham Harman, who reiterated Israel's vulnerability. The U.A.R. virtually surrounded Israel with hostile and unified forces. Harman worried about Egyptian rearmament that had begun in 1955 and now believed that they had obtained Russian MIG-19 fighters, ready for use by 1962.45

Kennedy told Harman that Israel should continue to seek weapons from traditional sources such as the French and British. He also discussed the Israeli inquiry about defensive HAWK (Homing All the Way Killer) anti-aircraft missiles. Kennedy wanted to know if Harman was formally requesting HAWK missiles, weapons previously requested during Eisenhower's administration. Eisenhower had not been inclined to sell them, especially after the Suez Crisis. Harman now said that Israel was not making an official request for HAWKS, but was examining the possibility.46 The State Department and the National Security Council both responded to Kennedy that the U.S. refused the

43 Rusk to Gilpatric, August 30, 1961, FRUS, 17:244; and Memorandum, Israel’s Atomic Energy Program, October 19, 1961, FRUS, 17:313.
44 Memorandum of Conversation, Reid and Kennedy, January 31, 1961, FRUS, 17:11.
original request for HAWK missiles on grounds that had not changed. They also asserted that the French "Super-Mystere" fighter jets the Israelis currently had were comparable to the Russian MIGs. No need existed for the U.S. to get involved in arming Israel when it could obtain good equipment from European allies. The Kennedy administration maintained this position at least throughout the first half of the presidency.47

Israel would continue to pressure Kennedy throughout his tenure in office, trying to force the U.S. into a much stronger commitment to a military alliance. It seems likely that Ben-Gurion simply wanted to press the HAWK issue in order to obtain this commitment, not because he needed weapons. In fact, the missiles would not have increased Israel's defense capability in any significant way. The HAWK was simply a ploy for Ben-Gurion's real purpose.48 Kennedy resisted at first, because to do otherwise would damage his larger aim in the Middle East: to create peace between Arab countries and Israel, and even more important, to keep a balance with both sides. He aimed to keep the Soviets out of the region at all costs and thought rapprochement between the U.S. and Arab states to be the best strategy. Israeli demands for more weapons did not correspond with this policy.

Thus, U.S.-Israeli relations during the early months of Kennedy's administration were rocky at best. First, the Dimona episode unfolded; Israel hedged on inspection and talked about the need for more weapons. Then in March 1961, a "dress rehearsal" of an Israeli Independence Day Parade turned out to be a full-blown military parade

45 Memorandum of Conversation, Israel's Security and Other Problems, February 16, 1961, FRUS, 17:26-27.
46 Ibid., 29.
(reminiscent of Soviet May-Day celebrations) prompting protests from Jordan and other Arab countries. It took place in Jerusalem, an obvious attempt by Israel to demonstrate their claims to the city. The U.S. tried to dissuade Israel from holding the parade and even went so far as to sponsor a UN Security Council Resolution on April 11, urging Israel to change the nature of the celebration.\textsuperscript{49} The military parade occurred as scheduled and without incident. Kennedy managed to postpone Ben-Gurion's request for a meeting until after the parade. Ben-Gurion had wanted to meet as early as April 13 and Kennedy pondered whether there should be any such conference at all. After reassurance from his advisors, he scheduled a quiet and unofficial meeting for May 30.\textsuperscript{50}

After Kennedy realized that Ben-Gurion would be requesting military aid, various members of the administration began offering advice. Talbot and Rusk agreed that Kennedy should use "quiet diplomacy" to try to bring about an Israeli-Arab settlement of the various subjects that divided them, such as the refugees and water rights. They concurred that the U.S. must avoid becoming an "arsenal for Israel," which might convince the Soviets that they must do the same for the U.A.R. A frustrated State Department criticized Israel's refusal to recognize a separate entity to represent the Arab refugees, and its reneging on a promise of 1949 to repatriate 150,000 refugees in exchange for peace.\textsuperscript{51} Bundy and other members of the National Security Council and Defense Department favored selling or giving HAWK missiles to Israel. Bundy argued that it would be a sensible action because the missiles were defensive only. Kennedy

\textsuperscript{49} Editorial Note, FRUS, 17:42.
\textsuperscript{50} Chester Bowles to John Badeau, May 10, 1961, FRUS, 17:104-105.
\textsuperscript{51} Talbot to Rusk, May 1, 1961, FRUS, 17:94.
always worried that such a sale would provoke similar demands from Pakistan and Iran, since both countries had already made earlier requests.52

When the meeting with Ben-Gurion finally occurred at the Waldorf-Astoria in New York on May 30, the first topic of conversation was the Dimona reactor. Kennedy asked for reassurances of its peaceful use, which the Prime Minister happily gave. He refused, however, to promise that Israel would never produce plutonium for weapons. Ben-Gurion discoursed at length on Egyptian weaponry, voicing fears that the Soviets were helping Egypt to develop nuclear missiles. He also had received reports that Egypt was employing West German engineers for this purpose.53 Ben-Gurion claimed that Eisenhower had all but promised HAWK missiles and did not understand Kennedy’s reluctance on the issue. Kennedy responded that he did not think this idea was wise, since it would provoke Arab demands. He also refused Ben-Gurion’s request to obtain a joint, Soviet-American statement recognizing Israel’s boundaries, which Kennedy thought would simply anger Nasser needlessly. He doubted that the Soviets would be interested in such a resolution because of recent Soviet threats over Berlin.54 Kennedy pressed Ben-Gurion to work toward repatriation of some refugees. A very reluctant premier promised to try.

News of Kennedy’s discussion with Ben-Gurion did not upset Arab countries as much as the President’s advisors had feared. Careful to inform all Arab countries in advance, Kennedy stressed that Ben-Gurion had requested the meeting and emphasized his toughness with Israel over the issue of refugees and the Dimona reactor. His reassurances sufficed, but the incident illustrated clearly the tightrope Kennedy had to

52 Memorandum of Conversation, HAWKS for Israel, May 8, 1961, FRUS, 17:102.
walk in Middle East policy-making. Throughout the rest of the year, talks between the United States and Israel followed the same general lines: Israeli requests for jets and missiles, American refusals and pressure for refugee repatriation.

In late 1961, two National Intelligence Estimate reports to the President outlined the state of affairs between Israel and the United States. The first stated that Ben-Gurion had successfully weathered the political crisis of the spring and that the Israeli economy was strong. The report predicted more “border” incidents with Arab states as conflicts over the Jordan River project and concerns over the Dimona plant further strained Arab-Israeli relations. The second report on Israel in 1961 was a memorandum from Talbot to Rusk, confirming earlier assessments that Israel was in good shape militarily and did not need more weapons to counter U.A.R. equipment. Indeed, it would later be evident that Israel maintained a constant superiority over its Arab neighbors, but pretended weakness in order to gain American support. Kennedy’s advisors felt that the U.S. should not associate closely with Israel if it ever expected to gain influence among Arab countries.

Saudi Arabia and Oil

As a vital part of his Middle East policy, Kennedy sought to preserve positive relations with royal regimes in the Middle East to insulate them from the threat of Arab radicals. Saudi Arabia was vital for its oil reserves, the position of ARAMCO, and as an

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54 Ibid., 136-7.
55 Meeting with Arab Ambassadors, Talbot, and NEA, June 2, 1961, POF Box 119a, JFKL.
56 Meyer Feldman to Kennedy, November 21 and Talbot to Rusk, November 22, 1961, FRUS, 17:330-344.
American military base. The Saudis granted the Americans their first oil concession in 1933 and commercial production began in 1938.\textsuperscript{57} By 1958, ARAMCO's oil wells produced in excess of one million barrels a day. The U.S. government first acknowledged the importance of Saudi oil during World War II by extending Lend-Lease money to the kingdom and promising protection from rivals. The U.S. also exchanged military equipment and training for use of the Dhahran Airfield beginning in 1946, and renewed in 1957.\textsuperscript{58}

Although in general, the U.S. government encouraged American oil companies in their exploration and production in the Middle East, the Justice Department sometimes sought to limit these companies via anti-trust laws. In 1949, the Federal Trade Commission published a report that ARAMCO was an illegal monopoly and should be broken up. The State and Defense Departments, as well as the C.I.A. fought this action and the Justice Department took no direct action against American oil companies. In fact, the government actively encouraged the American companies to create a new consortium and insert themselves into the Iranian Petroleum Company after 1953.\textsuperscript{59}

The problem by the late 1950s was that ARAMCO, and the other consortiums in Iran and Iraq, were finding it more difficult to sell their oil. The reason was a recent influx of cheap, Soviet oil on world markets. In order to compete with these new resources, American companies slashed their prices of Middle East oil. This problem, combined with the import quotas applied in the United States by first Eisenhower and then Kennedy, caused the price of oil to drop further. The oil-producing countries


themselves decided to raise the price of crude oil by limiting production. After two meetings in 1959 and 1960, Venezuela and Saudi Arabia led the formation of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC.60

Neither Eisenhower nor Kennedy took OPEC too seriously. The only real action taken during Kennedy's administration regarding OPEC was to set Robert Kennedy to work on finding a way around American anti-trust laws to allow the consortiums to collectively bargain, if necessary.61 Beyond this action, Kennedy paid little attention to OPEC and much more attention to individual oil producers, specifically Saudi Arabia. Although the principle behind OPEC was sound, various rivalries among Arab states made cooperation of any sort difficult. Iraq withdrew temporarily from the organization in 1961, and Saudi Arabia and Iran each suspected the other of trying to take oil revenues at its expense. Nasser was another factor that damaged OPEC's effectiveness in the early 1960s. His contest for leadership of the region made Saudi Arabia interested in a strong relationship with the West to counter his influence. This factor meant that a major member of OPEC would seek to avoid collective action that might threaten the United States. For a while, then, OPEC did not damage U.S.-Saudi relations.62

Although King Saud benefited from cooperation with the United States, he faced criticism from his Arab neighbors and groups inside the kingdom. Pan-Arabists within the country urged him to join proposed coalitions to fight the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Saud feared such action would lead to the toppling of the monarchy.

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60 Ibid., 514-518.
Rivalry within the royal family also threatened the regime. Although Saud supported Nasser's ideas for pan-Arabism and renewal, he also saw him as a threat. In 1958, evidence surfaced that Saud had sponsored an assassination attempt on Nasser. Critics of the royal family then resurrected an earlier demand for a constitutional monarchy; in order to preserve power, Crown Prince Faisal took over government operations.63

One of Faisal's rivals, a younger brother, Prince Talal, continued to press for a constitution and other reforms, leading Saud to gather support and retake control of the government in late 1960. For some time, Talal supported Saud because the latter promised to institute constitutional reform. Accordingly, Talal drew up a reform package he called "the Organic Law."64 It ensured that Saudi law corresponded with the Koran, called for a legislative assembly termed the "National Council," and restricted the power of the king. Saud simply ignored these plans and denied any changes to the government structure. This betrayal led to another change of power, as Faisal once again took control in the fall of 1961. One of the challenges Kennedy faced was to determine who really held the reigns of power in Saudi Arabia.

The first crisis Kennedy grappled with was Saud's unexpected announcement that he would not renew the Dhahran airfield agreement after it expired in April of 1962.65 Reports to the State Department from the field indicated that the King faced serious internal instability and that non-renewal of the airfield agreement with the U.S. might bolster his standing among pro-Nasserist factions. Privately, Saud assured Kennedy that

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64 Vassiliev, The History of Saudi Arabia, 358.
65 Lucius Battle to Ralph Dungan, March 21, 1961, FRUS, 17:51; and Wilson and Graham, Saudi Arabia: The Coming Storm, 146.
their relationship was still strong and would continue. Still, the non-renewal decision came as a shock to the Kennedy administration. Now, he felt he must reassure the Saudis of continuing American support in order to preserve them as allies.

Besides the continuing political maneuverings among his rivals in the royal family, Saud also believed that Nasser intended to absorb Saudi Arabia into a greater U.A.R. Evidence of assassination plots against the House of Saud often surfaced during the 1950s, along with a constant stream of radio propaganda. Saud’s brief infatuation with Nasser ended abruptly when the Suez Crisis exploded, disrupting Saudi oil revenues. Kennedy's efforts at rapprochement with Nasser angered Saud, hence the cancellation of the airfield agreement.

To deal with impending loss of the airfield, Rusk advised Kennedy to offer civilian assistance to the King in running the airfield. He hoped that this move would eventually lead to a renewal of the military agreement. In addition, the U.S. continued to supply the Saudis with weapons and, in July 1961, the Saudi Ambassador met with Kennedy and various members of the Joint Chiefs to discuss new purchase agreements. Kennedy assured the Saudis of his support and hoped that relations between the two would continue to be good. His major goal for Saudi Arabia was to maintain the status quo, and he believed that he could achieve it through continued weapons sales and military training agreements. Accordingly, the U.S. approved the arms sale which included 105mm and 155mm howitzers, assorted tanks, and eleven F-86 jets for a grand total value of $17 million.

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66 Ibid., 95-96.
67 Rusk to Kennedy, April 14, 1961, FRUS, 17:82-83; and Battle to Bundy, July 10 and October 9, 1961, NSF Box 331, JFKL.
On November 16, King Saud flew to the ARAMCO hospital in Dhahran for emergency treatment. Local observers reported that he had a bleeding, duodenal ulcer, and suffered from dangerously high blood pressure. The report further stated that the Saudi media was keeping information on the King's condition low-key and referred to an ongoing estrangement between Saud and his brother Faisal. The possibility of instability in Saudi Arabia was a real one if Saud died. The army predicted that a regime ruled by Faisal would continue to be pro-American, but perhaps not quite as friendly as Saud's had been.

On advice from several renowned British and American doctors, Saud flew to a hospital in Boston for surgery. Faisal assumed control during Saud's absence and internal conditions were calm. The fact that Kennedy did not visit him in the hospital upset Saud, but the President did invite him to visit Washington before he departed the U.S. For the most part, relations with Saudi Arabia finished out the year on a satisfactory note. While Saud was in the U.S., Ambassador Parker T. Hart wrote Rusk about plans to encourage Faisal to help mediate a dispute going on between Pakistan and Afghanistan. Hart hoped that, in the King's absence, Faisal would begin mediations that would appear to be a completely Saudi initiative. The idea was to keep the U.S. in the background if Saudi Arabia decided to try to mediate the dispute, an application of Kennedy's strategy of supporting allied governments while attempting to keep a low profile among their populations.

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68 Unsigned Army Message to Rusk, November 16, 1961, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
69 Rusk to Hart, no date, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
King Hussein of Jordan

Another royal regime and client of the United States was the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. King Hussein ascended the throne in 1953 at the tender age of eighteen. His grandfather, King Abdullah, had been assassinated the previous year and his Father, Prince Talal, battled schizophrenia and could not rule. Hussein learned much from his grandfather and would rule with a firm hand, resisting the waves of revolutionary nationalism with the help of the British until 1958, and the United States thereafter.

Jordan did not possess oil reserves and could not survive without substantial outside aid. If he accepted aid from Arab states, the King risked a foreign invasion. Nasser was eager to continue his pan-Arab aims and would be a dangerous ally. Syrian rulers had long espoused the concept of a "Greater Syria," and Israel often talked of dividing Jordan between Iraq and itself. In the wake of eroding British influence in the 1950s, Eisenhower sought to keep Jordan alive and firmly in the western camp by providing large amounts of aid and military support when necessary. He and his successor saw this little kingdom as a buffer to Nasser's more radical version of Arab nationalism.

The State Department, in a May 1961 report to Kennedy, called Jordan and the 25-year-old

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70 Hart to Rusk, December 15, 1961, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
72 Ilan Pappe, "Israel's Role in the 1958 Crisis," in Louis and Owens, eds., A Revolutionary Year, 250-251.
King "the key to the precarious stability which has been maintained in the Middle East for the past three years." 74

Hussein had to contend with several difficult issues in order to remain in power in Jordan. One issue was the fact that almost one fourth of the nearly two million people in Jordan were Arab refugees from Israel, one third of which were still living in camps. 75 This large segment of the population criticized Hussein's reliance upon western powers and his generally cordial relationship with Israel. For his part, Hussein recognized that quiet cooperation with Israel was as critical to his survival as monetary and military aid from Britain and the United States. Additionally, the Bedouins and rural communities had a long history of service in the British-controlled Arab Legion and favored cooperation with the West. The growing middle class and urban populations favored Nasserism and his "positive neutralism."

Hussein needed to maintain control of the West Bank region, which also required peaceful relations with Israel. Any threat from Arab refugees there might cause Israel to seize the West Bank, diminishing Hussein's influence and threatening his country's very existence. He also feared that any such move would bolster radical Arab claims that his regime was not legitimate. Concerned that Egypt, Israel, Iraq, or Syria might seek to absorb his state, he sought a delicate balance, much as Kennedy did, between his Arab neighbors.

As in the case of relations with the Saudi government, Kennedy hoped to minimize American involvement in Jordanian issues. It would not be helpful to King

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74 Rusk to Kennedy, Talking Paper: 'Jordan: Key to Stability,' May 1961, POF, Box 119a, JFKL.
Hussein to face internal instability brought on by anti-western sentiment. Kennedy needed to reassure Hussein that the U.S.-Israeli relationship would not weaken Arab-American relations and that the United States would not sacrifice royal regimes for the sake of rapprochement with Nasser. Hussein felt threatened by Nasser's pan-Arab aims and suspected the Egyptian leader of interference in Jordanian elections. The King also tended to blame Nasser for the frequent plots and assassination attempts against him. In late 1960 and early 1961, Hussein and Nasser corresponded, at Hussein's instigation, in order to calm tensions between them. Although this exchange of letters did relax Nasser's campaign of rhetoric, Hussein continued to blame Nasserism for internal unrest. In August of 1961, talks between Jordan and the Saudis floundered over recent Saudi-Egyptian cooperation during a crisis in Kuwait. Hussein saw Iraq as a possible ally against Nasser and so he only reluctantly supported the Arab League resolution against Iraq.

Hussein clearly saw Nasser as a threat to his regime and used American support to counter this threat. Kennedy hoped American aid would soften the impact that closer U.S.-Israeli relations might have on Hussein. Kennedy needed to further reassure the King when he attempted to improve relations between the U.S. and Egypt. In September 1961, Hussein heard rumors that the United States and Egypt were discussing a possible solution to the Arab refugee crisis. The King was adamant that he would never accept any solution imposed by Egypt or any other Arab nation. Jordan would end up housing most of the refugees in any such solution, Hussein knew, and was especially anxious that

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[76] Talbot to Middle East Embassies, no date, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
[77] Macomber to Rusk, June 13, 1961, NSF Box 125, JFKL; and Roland Dallas, King Hussein, 85-87.
[78] Macomber (Kocher) to Rusk, August 3, 1961, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
Nasser not develop strength at the expense of Jordanian prestige. Kennedy reassured Hussein that Nasser, while perhaps free to make suggestions, would never impose any solution to the refugee issue or any other crisis upon Jordan.

Kennedy also tried to reassure Jordan that while he was decreasing military aid from levels reached under Eisenhower, he would generously grant money for internal development projects. In fact, aid to Jordan for fiscal year 1962 was in excess of $60 million dollars, some ear-marked for the Jordan River project, and most for such general categories as "supporting assistance." The most Hussein had received from Eisenhower had been $45 million. In spite of Hussein's complaints, Kennedy's policy toward Jordan maintained a high level of economic aid in order to keep this pillar of U.S. policy stable.

Iran and the Shah

While most of the focus of the Kennedy administration on the Middle East rested on the Arab-Israeli conflict, one of the main areas of stability and strategic importance was Iran. The United States hoped to keep Iran as a strong and stable ally and did not anticipate much direct involvement in that region. However, a good portion of U.S. attention toward the Middle East in the first year of Kennedy's administration did just that.

Although perceived by the Americans as having one of the most stable regimes in the area, Shah Mohammed Riza Pahlavi was a ruler out of touch with his people and

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79 Macomber to Rusk, September 18, 1961, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
80 Talbot to Macomber, December 1, 1961, NSF 125, JFKL.
82 In a list of foreign policy priorities presented for the first few meetings of Kennedy's National Security Council, Iran was listed second only to security in South Vietnam. National Security Council Files, Box 283, JFKL.
their needs. He imagined internal threats to his power, particularly from the leftist Tudeh party or perhaps the remnants of the old National Front. Mostly, however, he worried about a Soviet invasion and insisted upon large amounts of aid to resist pressure from the North. One British diplomat, Desmond Harney, remarked that the Shah "saw (the Russians) as eight feet tall."83 Abdhassan Ebtehaj, head of the Shah's Plan Organization (coordinated economic planning and budgeting for Iran) recalled a meeting in 1959 with American military advisors. In his conversation with Admiral Arthur W. Radford, Eisenhower’s Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Ebtehaj asserted that what Iran needed was money for internal improvements, not guns. If the people are hungry, he argued, advanced military forces meant nothing to them. The Shah soon forced Ebtehaj’s resignation, along with other officials who resisted his hunger for weapons.84

To assist him in policy planning, Kennedy appointed McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow, Bundy’s Deputy Special Assistant for the NSA, to oversee a special task force on Iran under the National Security Council umbrella. One of the most vocal members of the task force was Robert Komer, a top-level aid to Bundy. These men would often conflict with such traditionalists in the State Department as Dean Rusk and Phillips Talbot.85 Other members of the task force on Iran included representatives from the C.I.A., U.S. Information Agency, the Treasury, William Bundy of the Defense Department, and Kenneth Hansen, Assistant Director of the Bureau of the Budget. All

84 Abdhassan Ebtehaj, in an interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, Tape 12; Khodadad Farmanfarmaian, in an interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, December 7, 1982, Cambridge, MA, Tape 4; and Desmond Harney, Tape 1, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University.
85 Kennedy to Rusk, February 2,1961, POF Box 87, JFKL: and see also James Goode, "Reforming Iran During the Kennedy Years," Diplomatic History 15 (1991): 13-29 for an examination of bureaucratic struggle for control over Iran policy.
asked serious questions about the stability of the Shah and possible American responses to his requests for aid. In its report in the fall of 1961, the Task Force on Iran argued: "to prevent Soviet domination of Iran must be our immediate and overriding objective. This requires the continuance in power of a pro-western regime, for the ultimate alternative is a weak neutralist government which could not withstand Soviet pressures." The report suggested various methods the U.S. could use to preserve the stability of the Shah. One option was to take a very open and active role in pushing for reforms, the other a more private, discreet one. Whatever the method, Iran must be stable in order to contain the Soviet Union.

Other reports from the Joint Chiefs of Staff cautioned against placing too much confidence in the person of the Shah. Since conditions inside Iran were uncertain, the U.S. ought to "disassociate itself from the Shah should he appear likely to be overthrown." Some reports painted a picture of Iran as an inevitable disaster waiting to happen: a dictatorial Shah, an un-reformed economy, and a growing unrest within the urban middle class. Other analysts placed Iran on the "less critical list" for policy planning. Still, most policy-makers agreed that the U.S. approach to Iran should shift "from military to politico-diplomatic forms of collaboration." Kennedy should pressure the Shah to begin internal reforms before giving him large sums of money. Most agreed that only through such reform could the Shah avoid internal instability. Some portrayed

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86 Report by Chairman of Iran Task Force, Oct. 14, 1961, FRUS, 17:293; and Memo: James S. Lay, Jr., to Walt Rostow, Feb. 8, 1961, NSF, Box 283, JFKL; and Task Force Report, October 18, 1961, FRUS, 17:307
87 Memorandum From the Joint Chiefs of Staff to Secretary of Defense McNamara, FRUS, 17: 7; Memo: Halla to Bundy, Feb. 8, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; and Position Paper on Iran: Summary of Intelligence, no date. NSF, Box 115, JFKL.
88 National Intelligence Estimate, February 28, 1961, FRUS, 17:37; Memo: Halla to Bundy, Feb. 8, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; and Position Paper on Iran: Summary of Intelligence, no date. NSF, Box 115, JFKL.
the monarch as an unruly and selfish dependent who should not receive top priority in attention or dollars.

Ideas from inside the State Department, however, did not agree with this assessment. Rusk was eager for Kennedy to pay direct attention to the Shah and assure him that U.S. support for Iran was still strong. The Shah was apparently so insecure that he sent General Teimur Bakhtiar, chief of Iranian security and intelligence, to meet with the President.89 Kennedy gave reassurances and Rusk made personal promises that the U.S. would always come to the aid of Iran in case of any outside threat.90 Although Rusk did not contradict NSC assessments of Iran, he favored closer ties with the Shah than did the NSC.

Most American officials agreed that if the Shah did not initiate reforms, whatever the method, he eventually would be overthrown. Some suggested a decrease in military aid to pressure the Shah to reduce his standing army from more than 200,000 to around 150,000. Iran also received a significant amount of financial support for internal operations. Kennedy wanted to gradually reduce this aid, making Iran more self-sufficient. Overall, the direction of the administration appeared to be a departure from an earlier preoccupation with military power vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.91

In this atmosphere of change early in the Kennedy administration, several people involved in policy-making sincerely tried to re-evaluate approaches toward aid to such developing countries as Iran. Komer, among others, attended a Brookings Seminar in late April 1961 that examined the use of western aid and its political impact. The report,

89 Memo: Rusk to Kennedy, Feb. 16, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL.
90 Memo of Conversation: Rusk and Bakhtiar, Feb. 21, 1961, FRUS, 17:32-33.
91 Letter by Gagaine, no date, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; Ken Hansen, Note on Iran, April 1, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; Letter: T. Cuyler Young to Rostow, April 19, 1962, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; William
submitted to Bundy and Rostow on May 2, discussed several key points. One idea was that the west had "tended to associate nationalism in the less developed areas rather simply with the overthrow of colonialism." A second point was the frequent misunderstanding of the appeals of communism. Attendees concluded that its appeal lay in its anti-western, yet modernizing nature. This concept contradicted traditional assumptions that communism appealed primarily as a strategy for development.

This report, however, made little impact on policy toward Iran. The State and Defense Departments tended to continue policy based on the older assumption that containment of the Soviet Union was the primary goal. Other problem areas such as Cuba and Berlin relegated Iran too far down the priority list in foreign policy planning. As far as Iran was concerned, officials formed policy on an ad hoc basis in response to crises as they emerged. In spite of the sometimes-grandiose intentions of the New Frontiersmen, such became the norm.

Then in May 1961 (shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco), one of these crises occurred when teacher strikes and demonstrations in Tehran erupted over a decrease in wages. About 50,000 students joined the teachers and clashed with Iranian army and security forces on May 4, causing the collapse of the regime of the Shah's Prime Minister, Jafar Sharif Emami. The Shah replaced him with a Dr. Ali Amini, a former colleague of Mossadeq in the 1950s, and quickly disbanded the Iranian Majlis (parliament). No one knew whether Amini would be a good ally or not. Ambassadors and diplomats in the field recommended a wait-and-see approach while the newly-created Task Force on Iran recommended cautious support of Amini to steer him toward reform.

Gaud, Interview by Bill Jones, February 16, 1966, 40, Oral History Program, JFKL; Ken Hansen Notes, NSF box 115, JFKL; and Memo: Morgan to Bundy, March 27, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL.
They urged that the U.S. deal directly with Amini and work to divest the Shah from more intimate involvement in government.93

The Shah pretended to give his new Prime Minister support for dramatic reform of the government, as well as in redistribution of land. In reality, the Shah felt the United States had forced Amini on him.94 U.S. diplomat William Miller later recalled that the Shah "never trusted Amini because he'd come with America's backing" and associated him with the hated Mossadeq.95 He also argued, however, that Kennedy had not forced Amini on the Shah, but had only voiced approval when his name was mentioned. The U.S. knew Amini through his work with the World Bank, and most officials considered him very competent.

It was during this critical period of Amini's tenure that disagreements among American policy-makers began to emerge. Most diplomats were supportive of Amini, but others, such as Ambassador Edward Wailes and his replacement, Julius Holmes, vacillated between encouraging Amini toward reform and calming the nerves of the Shah. Komer and other members of the NSC Task Force were much more eager to push Amini as hard as possible. Rusk was primarily interested in preserving the status quo out of fear of more unrest or a possible coup. Both groups wanted reform, but disagreed on the risk they were willing to take to get it. Kennedy faced a delicate choice of approaches or to find a blend of the two.

Throughout the rest of 1961, various members of the National Security Council, especially Komer and Bundy, conflicted with officials in the State Department and

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92 Robert Johnson to Bundy and Rostow, May 2, 1961, NSF, Box 283, JFKL.
93 Wailes to Rusk, May 10, 1961, FRUS, 17:105; and Memo from Komer, Iran Task Force Report, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; Editorial Note, FRUS, 17: 98-100; Special National Intelligence Estimate, May 23, 1961, FRUS, 17:122-123; and Memo: Amory to Bundy, May 23, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL.

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Ambassador Holmes over policy. Komer referred to a conference at Princeton that examined U.S.-Iranian relations and argued that "there is just no definable correlation between economic development and political change...." Most attendees agreed that the U.S. should decrease aid to Iran because the New Frontier had fallen victim to the "fallacy of seeking answers in economic determinism. We have no theory of political and social change to complement our theory of economic development," Komer wrote.

Even the British did not form a clear set of objectives in spite of their continuing presence in Iran and the CENTO alliance. They curried the Shah's favor, sold him weapons, and sought to keep his regime stable. They agreed with the U.S. that the Shah was the only option for Iran at the time and sought, above all, to pacify him. The policy was, in the words of British diplomat Desmond Harney, "day-to-day fire prevention." As long as the Shah was happy and did not cancel any defense contracts with Britain, all was well. There was no long-term plan or even study on the impact of western support on the royal regime.

Either the Shah's western allies did not know how to act differently, or they found the risks involved too uncomfortable. In the case of the United States, it did not help that major players within the NSC disagreed so vehemently with the State Department. While Komer thought U.S. policy was "going to hell in a hack in Iran," Holmes argued that they

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95 Miller, Tape 4; and Farmanfarmaian, Tape 13.
96 Komer to Bundy, Oct. 28, 1961, NSF, Box 116b, JFKL; Rusk to Holmes, Oct. 31,1961, FRUS, 17: 319; Bromley Smith to Kennedy, July 26, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; Task Force Report, August 2, 1961, FRUS, 17: 200; Komer to Kennedy, Aug. 4, 1961, NSF, Box 115, JFKL; and Battle to Bundy, Aug. 11, 1961, FRUS, 17: 226.
97 Komer to Bundy and Saunders to Komer, Dec. 20, 1961, NSF, Box 116b, JFKL.
98 Harney, Tape 1 and 2.
had to keep the Shah satisfied or he would turn to the Soviet Union. Both ignored the possibility that either appeasement or discipline would have damaging effects on Iranian identity, thereby fueling the fires of nationalism.

Although Kennedy’s aim to support friendly regimes in the Middle East was a logical policy, it conflicted with other aims for the region as a whole. Kennedy wanted to draw Egypt closer to the west, thus preventing the creation of a Soviet stronghold there. This was a legitimate aim, but Nasser’s goal of leadership of Arab nationalism meant he would often clash with traditional Arab regimes. American support of Israel was a major obstacle to rapprochement with Nasser, of course, but so was the policy of supporting the Shah, Hussein, and the Saudis. As each leader demanded a relationship and support from the United States, Kennedy’s aims soon succumbed to local rivalries.

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CHAPTER 4

WOOING THE NEUTRALS

As a primary part of his "Three-Pronged Plan" for the Middle East, Kennedy began to focus on creating a working relationship with Gamal Abd al-Nasser of Egypt. Relations had already improved between the two countries since the Suez Crisis in 1956, but hopes were high on both sides that the new administration would be able to make a new start. Kennedy wanted to draw Egypt to the West and decrease its dependence on the Soviets. Nasser wanted economic aid from the U.S. as long as it did not jeopardize his neutral status in the Cold War conflict. Both sides would have to avoid the subject of Israel and smooth over their differences in such other hot spots as Cuba, the Congo, and Algeria.

Aid to Nasser

Although the Egyptian-American relationship had been steadily improving since 1958, Nasser was not at all certain how things would go with Kennedy. The new President had made some tough statements regarding Arab treatment of Israel in his campaign speeches and Nasser feared a new, hard-line attitude. Information on Israel's Dimona Reactor had reached Arab states and Nasser was concerned enough to issue an early warning to the U.S. that Egypt might be forced to "take radical action." ¹ He relaxed, however, after Kennedy assured Nasser that the purpose of the reactor was peaceful, and that the U.S. would be willing to set aside the subject of Israel for a time.

It is important to understand Nasser’s economic goals for Egypt in evaluating his relationship with the United States. At the start of the 1960s, the Egyptian economy was

struggling to overcome problems such as an unequal distribution of wealth, low levels of income and consumption, low life expectancies, low industrial output and an over-reliance on cotton cash crops. Nasser had been engaged in agrarian reforms through land redistribution during Eisenhower’s administration and would now in the 1960s concentrate on a nationalization program of the entire U.A.R. economy. This use of socialist economic policy concerned Kennedy, but American policy-makers largely ignored it, as long as Egypt progressed and maintained friendship with the West.

From the American point-of-view, the Egyptian President was a troublesome, but very important Arab leader whose friendship should be cultivated. Komer had advised the Eisenhower administration to promote a relationship with Nasser, but Dulles ignored the advice. Kennedy, however, listened to Komer. Diplomats in the field informed the President that the Soviets had significant influence on the U.A.R. because of "three screws" they could use to exert pressure: cotton purchases, arms supplies, and financing for the Aswan Dam. Nasser nonetheless had made it clear through his Ambassador to the U.S., Mustafa Kemal, that he would not bend to Soviet pressure and believed the "Arab-Israeli question should be put in the refrigerator and not discussed in [the] American political arena." If the two countries could concentrate on economic and cultural cooperation, separate from the Arab-Israeli issue, then real progress might be possible. Kennedy had already stated during his campaign that if neutrality and Arab nationalism were the current trends in the Middle East, the U.S. should "learn to live with it" as the only alternative to Soviet domination. Thus, communication began between Nasser and Kennedy in an atmosphere of hope.

4 Reid to Kennedy, FRUS, 17:11; and Rusk to Reinhart, February 8, 1961, FRUS, 17:18.
From the start, however, subjects other than Israel began to intervene. In late February, anti-American statements showed up in the Egyptian press, prompted by U.S. action in the Congo. Granted a grudging independence from Belgium in June 1960, the country was in the midst of civil war as various factions sought control. The U.A.R. saw any American intervention there as evidence of colonialism. Nasser was angry that the U.S. was backing Joseph Mobutu, the recently appointed army general who was now running the country for his Prime Minister, Patrice Lumumba. Nasser barely stopped short of official recognition of the Antoine Gizenga regime, established in the Northeast of the country and viewed by the U.S. as communist. Rusk made angry public statements regarding this "recognition" by the U.A.R., which created a strong outcry in the Egyptian press.6 When Lumumba was killed in late February, Nasser wrote the new President a letter protesting American involvement.7

As John Badeau arrived in Egypt to replace Reinhardt, he delivered a message to Nasser that the U.S. was upset at the Egyptian press. He emphasized that the U.S. had legitimate reasons for involvement in the Congo, Algeria, and especially Cuba, and reminded Nasser of the $140 million in American aid he had recently received.8 There had been some anti-American demonstrations at the American embassy in Cairo on February 15, at which time Nasser failed adequately to protect Americans.

The problem, from Nasser's viewpoint, was that as a leader of nationalism, he had promised to lead Africa, not just the Arab world, in its anti-imperialist struggle. Nasser viewed his and Egypt's place in the world as a vital center of three circles: the African world, the Arab world, and more broadly the Islamic world.9 Not only did Nasser seek to lead any pan-Arab union, he also intended all Islamic countries to look to him for

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6 Reinhardt to Rusk, February 18, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
7 Heikal, The Cairo Documents, 194.
8 Rusk to the U.A.R. Embassy, March 18, 1961, FRUS, 17:49.
leadership. He believed he should lead his fellow Africans to independence from the
West and to this aim, Nasser sent arms to rebels in the Congo. This action, however,
conflicted with his need for Western assistance for industrial growth in Egypt.

In spite of a rocky start, the two countries were able to set aside some of the most
divisive issues and begin a closer relationship. In May 1961, Kennedy met at length with
Ambassador Kemal and discussed all the important issues that stood between them.
Kennedy assured him that Israel’s Dimona reactor was for peaceful purposes only and
that the U.S. did not intend to interfere with the status quo in the Middle East or meddle in
inter-Arab disputes. The two countries also agreed to keep the Israeli question "in the
refrigerator" and concentrate on more beneficial topics, such as aid for internal
development and possible settlement of the refugee problem.

By summer, the State Department defined the plan to woo Nasser with more
realism. Talbot assessed policy as follows:

We...have no illusions that any broad understanding with Nasser is possible. We
do feel, however, that modest assistance is useful to help the UAR meet its
massive challenge of industrialization and over-population and to make clear that
there is a continuing alternative to full reliance on communist bloc assistance.

In light of this assessment, the State Department recommended that Kennedy invite
Nasser on an official visit to the U.S. sometime in the near future. The U.S. also
concluded a PL-480 agreement on May 27 to send Egypt an additional 200,000 tons of
wheat and flour to help make up for a bad harvest.

While the State Department assumed it was providing prudent guidance to
Kennedy regarding relations with Nasser, others in the administration did not agree. As in
the case of Iran, Komer wanted more action. After reading a State Department report

10 Nutting, Nasser, 287-289.
11 President's Conversation with Kemal, no date, NSF Box 168, JFKL; and Rusk to Foreign
Minister Fawzi, June 17, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
12 Talbot to McGhee, May 30, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
13 Bowles to Kennedy, May 16, 1961, FRUS, 17:114
14 Talbot to McGhee, May 30, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
written on May 30, Komer urged Rostow to put pressure on Rusk and his department. He was disappointed that all the diplomats were willing to tell Kennedy that current policy was good. He felt it was far too cautious and argued that what Kennedy had actually asked for was not a status report, but a planning paper on how to further rapprochement with Nasser. Komer believed that the U.S. was missing an opportunity because the State Department was "play[ing] by ear again."\(^{(15)}\)

Rostow also felt it was being too cautious and urged that Kennedy take advantage of recent strains in the U.A.R.-U.S.S.R. relationship.\(^{(16)}\) What he envisioned was some kind of a multi-year, economic agreement beyond the current PL-480 aid to bind Nasser closer to the US. Like Komer, Rostow requested more study by the State Department.

As the weeks passed, anti-Soviet campaigns in the Egyptian press and verbal sparring between the two countries over such issues as the Congo made a US-UAR rapprochement even more possible.\(^{(17)}\) The Soviets were angry that Nasser was posing as the only non-imperialistic supporter of African nationalism, undercutting their efforts there. Taking advantage of the rift, Kennedy's advisors began pressing even harder for the development of a rapprochement with Nasser. Walt Rostow urged such plans, as did Komer and others. Senator J. William Fulbright, chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, had a meeting with Kemal, who indicated that Nasser was open to closer ties, especially economic ones, and brought up the subject of multi-year PL-480 aid.\(^{(18)}\) The State Department recommended extending an official invitation to Nasser for a state visit sometime in the spring of 1962, although Komer urged that it be sooner.\(^{(19)}\)

A National Intelligence Report, submitted to the President on June 27, also supported rapprochement with Nasser. Its authors asserted that "militant nationalism will

\(^{(15)}\) Komer to Rostow, June 2, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
\(^{(16)}\) Rostow to McGhee, June 6, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
\(^{(17)}\) Anschuetz (Cairo Embassy) to Rusk, June 8, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
\(^{(18)}\) Memorandum of Conversation, Fulbright and Kamel to Rostow, June 9, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
\(^{(19)}\) Memorandum for the President, May 16, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL; and Komer to Rostow, June 9, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
continue to be the most important dynamic force in Arab political affairs" and that Nasser would continue to lead this force. They also contended that while such nationalism would continue to use neutralism to achieve independence, they did not think any kind of a large, pan-Arab union likely. They also warned that without further outside aid, the U.A.R. might fall apart and breed internal instability in Egypt. With this information in mind, Komer again argued that it was the perfect time for rapprochement with Nasser by some tangible means, such as long-term economic aid. He added that the U.S. should give aid only if Nasser knew that Kennedy "expect[ed] a compensatory quid pro quo in a less antagonistic policy on his part." 

By the end of the summer, various departments submitted papers on long-term aid programs, presumably at Kennedy's request. One of the plans involved the building of grain silos and the funding and organization of the U.A.R. Ministry of Supply. A Mr. R. W. Weitz, representing his own distribution company (called the Weitz Company), presented estimates of around $100 million dollars for grain storage and distribution in Egypt and Syria. He argued that such a project would not only strengthen the Egyptian economy, but also would be visible to the average Egyptian citizen and improve the American image. Komer talked with Weitz and concluded that this would be a very good public relations move for Kennedy. Other plans included a proposal to use PL-480 funds to build public housing in Egypt - again, a high-profile activity that would give visibility to the United States. Policy-makers urged this action because Egypt had not publicized the PL-480 sales in the past. If the U.S. were going to draw Nasser into a better relationship with the West, it would need to improve Egyptian public opinion. With

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21 Komer to Rostow, June 30, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
22 Memorandum for the Record, Komer and Weitz, September 11, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL; and Battle to Bundy, no date, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
23 Dispatch, Cairo Embassy/USOM to Rusk, July 10, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.

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plans for extensive aid and an American visit by Nasser, Kennedy hoped to meet these aims.

**Breakup of the U.A.R.**

Then in late September 1961, a crisis erupted that would put all such plans at least temporarily on hold. Although few thought the union of Syria and Egypt very strong, the declaration by Syria of withdrawal from the U.A.R. threatened to create shock waves in the region. On September 27, word came from the embassy in Damascus that the Syrian Vice president of the U.A.R., Abd al-Hamid Sarraj, had resigned and returned to Syria.\(^{24}\) The Ambassador in Syria asserted that under the present situation, Nasser would have to quickly appease unhappy Syrians or face a possible coup there. He detected a large degree of dissatisfaction with the tight controls Nasser had placed on the country, even though Syria was supposed to be an equal partner in the Arab union. Nasser's alienation of the Baath (rebirth) Party was another major problem. The Baath had instigated the union with Egypt for the greater, pan-Arab cause. After union, however, Nasser ignored party leaders and replaced them with Egyptians. On September 28, heavy telegram traffic to and from Damascus indicated that in fact, a coup, led by the Syrian army, was underway.\(^{25}\)

Reports from Jordan during the early days of the coup reflected happiness about the breakup of the U.A.R., while voicing some concern. King Hussein moved his forces to the Syrian border as a precaution. The response in Beirut was mild and restrained. Most of the Christian Lebanese supported the coup, while the Muslims hoped that Nasser would reassert control.\(^{26}\) Kennedy's advisors decided to cancel a previously scheduled

\(^{24}\) Knight to Rusk, September 27, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL.


\(^{26}\) Macomber to Rusk, September 28, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; and Wilson to Rusk, September 29, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL.
visit of the American Sixth Fleet to Lebanon out of concern that Nasser would use it as an indication of American involvement in the coup.27

While trying to keep aloof of actions on the ground, Kennedy quietly pressured Nasser to accept the inevitable. While the results of the breakup would not be clear for some time, American policy became one of gradually accepting the results of the coup and recognition of an independent Syria. Nasser was uncertain how to respond to the crisis. If he struck back at the coup leaders immediately, he had a chance of stopping it, but any delay would make it impossible to halt. Nasser did make some attempt with a unit of paratroopers near Latakia, but the move was unsuccessful and unconfirmed reports stated that Syrian forces killed all 200 Egyptian paratroopers that landed.28 After this attempt, Nasser decided to back off and not risk any kind of war with Jordan and Israel.

To take the place of the U.A.R. government in Syria, local army forces appointed a Dr. Ma'mum Kuzbari as Prime Minister and gave him sweeping executive powers until he could appoint a cabinet and hold elections for an assembly. Almost immediately, Kuzbari received official recognition from Jordan and then requested the same from other countries, including the U.S. Consensus within Kennedy's administration was that the U.S. should eventually recognize an independent Syria, but not too soon, and hopefully only after more Arab countries and the Soviet Union had acted.29

Throughout the weeks of uncertainty, American policy makers wondered what the impact of the Syrian coup would be on Nasser. If it succeeded, the blow to his prestige might make him very dangerous. Komer worried that this failure at pan-Arab leadership


28 Circular, Bowles to Middle East Diplomatic Posts, September 29, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; Bowles to all ME Embassies and Bundy, September 29, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; and Wilson to Rusk, September 29, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.

29 Wilson to Rusk, September 29, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; Macomber to Rusk, September 29, 1961; Knight to Rusk, September 30, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; Battle to Bundy, September 30, 1961, FRUS, 17:271; Bowles to all ME Embassies, September 29, 1961; and Knight to Rusk, September 30, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL.
might make him either more belligerent toward Israel, or perhaps even "drive him back into the arms of Moscow." Nasser, however, was angry at the Soviets for their early recognition of Syria. In the end, this event worked to push Nasser closer to the U.S. He would carefully gauge his response to Syria by what he perceived to be American reaction. He wanted and needed closer ties to the U.S., at least for the present.

Although the US held its breath for several weeks, no significant military response came from Nasser over Syria. By mid October, Nasser was making speeches asserting that domestic issues now would be his primary focus. Although he did not relinquish his assumed role as leader of pan-Arabism, he would now grapple with grave, internal economic problems. Earlier in the year, Nasser declared the nationalization of much of Egypt's industry and now he made speeches about the evils of capitalism, on which he partially blamed the Syrian coup and lack of Arab unity in general. However, the process of nationalization and implementation of the so-called Five Year Plan would be virtually impossible without outside help. Nasser began looking even more eagerly than before to the United States for aid. Kennedy, for his part, began to receive advice on what events in the U.A.R. meant for U.S. policy. In spite of the American distaste for nationalized industry and socialism in general, the U.S. began to consider Nasser in an even more favorable light than before.

Among the various pieces of advice, Komer added his thoughts again. He continued to urge that "the time has come for us to make a gesture toward Nasser...." since he was now safely focusing on domestic issues. Visiting Nasser in October 1961, Senator Hubert Humphrey talked about everything from industrial development to Nasser's policy on the Arab refugees and friendship with Castro. Throughout the

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30 Komer to Bundy and Rostow, September 30, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL; and Badeau to Rusk, October 12, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL.
31 Badeau to Rusk, October 14, 1961, NSF Box 161, JFKL.
32 Battle to Bundy, September 30, 1961, FRUS, 17:268-269; Battle to Bundy, October 22, 1961, 1961 and Badeau to Rusk, October 19, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
33 Komer to Kennedy, October 26, 1961, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
conversation, Nasser emphasized that he did not approve of communism or of Soviet imperialism in the Middle East. He believed that Egypt and the U.S. shared this common interest, which should bind them closer together.\(^{34}\) In fact, Nasser was concerned that a weak, new president and cabinet in Syria would lead to communist infiltration into its government. He also tried hard to convince Humphrey that he was not a communist, only a leftist. He wished that the US would understand the difference, especially in the case of African countries attempting to gain independence, such as Algeria and the Congo.

Humphrey recommended to Kennedy that the time was right to work on Nasser through generous aid for industrial development and agriculture. He also encouraged Kennedy to continue personal correspondence with Nasser. Harold H. Saunders, a staff member of the NSC, also advised Kennedy to raise the American profile in Egypt by granting money for bigger projects, rather than just the PL-480 aid generally received.\(^{35}\) At the same time, however, he was skeptical of both Egypt's ability to properly use the requested money and the possibility that Nasser would reorient himself to the West. Yet in spite of a healthy dose of caution, policy makers began formulating plans regarding aid for grain storage projects, slaughterhouses, chemical plants, housing, and insecticides to fight the cotton worm destroying Egypt's crop.\(^{36}\)

By the end of the year, most of Kennedy's advisors were convinced that Egypt was in significant economic trouble, a fact that threatened Nasser's stability. All agreed that these factors created a condition ripe for rapprochement.\(^{37}\) Even the usually reluctant State Department advocated some kind of initiative, supporting a multi-year aid package, more economic advisors to Egypt, and continued personal contact with Nasser. Komer went so far as to say that he "no longer [had] any reason to accuse State of being

\(^{34}\) Memo of Conversation, Humphrey and Nasser, to Komer, October 22, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
\(^{35}\) Saunders to Kennedy, November 13, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
\(^{36}\) Saunders to Rostow, November 21, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL; and Saunders to Dungan, December 19, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
\(^{37}\) Rostow to Kennedy, December 6, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL; Komer to Bundy, December 8, 1961, and Komer to Kennedy, December 8, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
dilatory.” It was ironic that the U.S. and U.A.R. were busy making plans for financial cooperation for Egyptian industry and agriculture, while at the same time, the U.S. continued its Cold War rhetoric, and Nasser made speeches condemning capitalist imperialism and espousing his form of Arab Socialism. Both sides, however, needed each other: Nasser to keep Egypt from going bankrupt, and the U.S. to safeguard passage of oil through the Suez Canal, and to keep peace on Israel’s frontiers. Both sides had much to gain by rapprochement.

Independent Syria

Meanwhile, Kennedy would have to decide on an approach toward an independent Syria. After some weeks of uncertainty, it became clear that the Supreme Arab Revolutionary Command of the Armed Forces (SACRA) would run the government as a military junta, with a civilian cabinet executing, rather than creating, policy. Most appointed leaders of the temporary government were moderate Baathists who were leftists, but anti-communist. While this fact was encouraging, U.S. officials were not at all convinced that the breakup of the U.A.R. would be in the American best interest. They did hope that if the current Syrian regime remained stable, there might be good, long-term results that would include a more pliable Nasser and a Syria dependent on U.S. aid. Both these options contained inherent dangers. Nasser, because of the blow to his prestige, might lash out at Israel to regain face, or Syria might become vulnerable to accusations of being an imperialist tool, conditions that would open the door to the communists and threaten the stability of neighboring Israel. Overall, the situation was unsettling.

As the days passed, several Arab countries, the Soviet Union, and some European nations recognized the new Syrian government. The U.S. extended recognition on

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38 Komer to Kennedy, December 8, and Komer to Dungan, December 19, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
39 Badeau to Rusk, December 26, 1961, NSF 168, JFKL.
40 Battle to Bundy, September 30, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL; Knight to Rusk, October 6, 1961, McSweeney (Moscow) to Rusk, October 6, 1961; and Hilsman to Rusk, no date, Knight to Rusk, October 8, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.

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October 10, 1961, after giving advanced warning and reassurances to Nasser. Syria then began negotiations with the U.S. for PL-480 wheat, flour and rice to relieve some drought-stricken areas of the country. While the United States expected to receive credit for the aid, it did not want the Syrian government opening itself to accusations of being overly Western-oriented and it wished to avoid the implication that the U.S. had been involved in the coup. Thus, Kennedy tried again to carry out what many called an "even-handed approach" toward all sides in the Middle East, trying to maintain good relations with both Egypt and Syria. U.S. policy-makers sought to carry out objectives for both countries with as much acceptance of moderate neutrality as was possible in the Cold War atmosphere.

While the U.S. attempted to take advantage of a weaker Nasser and establish good relations with independent Syria, there still loomed the fear of pan-Arab unity that might be anti-Western in nature. With the new Syrian government scarcely a month old, rumors began to surface that it had made a proposal to Jordan for an economic union. While nothing came of this proposal during 1961, it kept the U.S. intently watching Syria for trouble. The State Department closely monitored the actions (or inactions) of communists in Syria as well as possible action by students and pro-Nasser peasants. Syrian peasants approved of Nasser's concepts of Arab Socialism, although they had not had the chance to benefit from it before the coup. The future stability of Syria would depend on how well the new regime appealed to the peasants with new economic programs and assistance.

After Syria finally held permanent elections, the regime remained conservative, with only small victories for Nasser supporters and nothing but defeat for communists. Voters elected a Dr. Nazim al-Qudsi as president of the Syrian Republic and Kennedy

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41 Series of Telegrams, October 8-11, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.
42 Knight to Rusk, October 8, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL; and Ball to all US Diplomatic Posts in Middle East, October 13, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.
43 Macomber to Rusk, October 26, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL; and Knight to Rusk, October 26, November 6, November 11 and 12, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.
sent a letter of congratulations. Syria needed more than congratulations, however, and had already requested immediate aid in the form of almost 60,000 tons of wheat and flour as well as feed grain for cattle. The U.S. was not ready to give such huge amounts of aid immediately, both for political reasons and for the lack of sufficient American surpluses.

While the United States sought a good relationship with Syria, it wanted to get something for its aid. The newly appointed American ambassador, Ridgway B. Knight, strongly urged the State Department to grant some $15 million in loans without any demands for a "technical aid agreement" to control how the money was used. The U.S. had been pursuing such an arrangement as a condition for U.S. loans. Knight argued that accepting such a bilateral agreement would be politically impossible in Syria and might lead to anti-American sentiment. He asserted that if the U.S. would prove itself a friend without "strings attached," then the Syrians would most likely agree to technical aid attached to future grants.

The U.S. did eventually promise Syria to help it find emergency funding without a technical aid agreement. By the end of 1961, the West Germans planned to give Syria between $15 to $20 million in aid, and the IMF promised more. The U.S. promised to make up whatever else it took to reach the approximately $40 million Syria said it needed. Kennedy's Middle East policy had weathered two major crises, the first one in Iran, and the second in the breakup of the U.A.R. More problems with Syria and Israel would later develop over the Sea of Galilee. For now, however, Kennedy's policy was both stable and balanced in the wake Syria's separation from Egypt.

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44 Knight to Rusk, December 4, and Kennedy to Qudsi, December 21, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.
45 Rusk to Knight, December 1, 1961, NSF 161, JFKL.
46 Knight to Rusk, January 18, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
47 Ibid.
48 Gavin (Paris) to Rusk, December 12, and 16, 1961 and Policy Directive Paper, February 27, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
Nationalism in Iraq

Plans did not go so smoothly in dealing with Arab nationalism in Iraq. The British had held a mandate over the area from 1917 until 1932. The Iraqi government, however, maintained close ties to Britain and allowed it to keep military bases until the revolution in 1958. There had been an uprising in 1920, which the British quickly suppressed. Although Britain did attempt to grant some self-rule to the Iraqis, it remained very much an "indigenous government, under effective and indisputable British control." The British installed Faisal II as a puppet monarch with a constitution they had drafted for him. Faisal ruled under the mandate until 1932 when Iraq formally gained independence. The Iraqis, however, did not view the regime as independent at all. Hussain Jamil, a political activist during the revolution in 1958, argued that the entire Iraqi economy, which included an enormous oil concession and a system of feudal land ownership, was "geared to the benefit of Britain."  

As it did in other countries in the Middle East, Britain introduced Western patterns of land ownership in Iraq, quickly concentrating a majority of the nation's wealth into a few hands. This approach destroyed tribal systems of collective land ownership or usage and placed the common people at the mercy of wealthy landlords who sold their agricultural products to Britain at low rates. The people of Iraq viewed their "independence" with great skepticism. There was no real agreement on what should be done, however. A mix of interests, including a growing Baathist party, communists, pan-Arab unionists, republicans and religious conservatives, all wanted change but could not agree on what form it should take. Eventually, a group of young, army officers, inspired by the "Free Officers" revolt in Egypt in 1952, formed their own association and planned

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50 Ibid, 5-6.
51 Ibid, 6-7.
an eventual coup. Their hope was to institute democratic reforms and create social
programs for the poorer classes.52

In fact, conditions in Iraq were terrible on the eve of the revolution of 1958. A
majority of the population was poor, mostly illiterate peasants. Although the government
was supposedly a constitutional monarchy, there were no freedoms of speech and press
and the government carefully orchestrated all elections. Hussein Jamil recalled that "a
campaign of terror was let loose in Iraq where every semblance of democracy was
abandoned...."53 A series of executions of political opponents took place during the 1940s
and public demonstrations against Prime Minister Nuri al-Said began to grow. The
growth of the Baath Party in Syria influenced Iraqi intellectuals and the middle class.
Throughout the 1950s, this group steadily grew both in size and in its opposition to what
they saw as a government that was a client of Western powers.54 National uprisings had

In addition to growing frustration with the close association of Iraq’s ruling elite
with the British government, Nasser’s struggle against imperialism in 1956 during the
Suez crisis inspired the birth of various parties. This action by the British, along with the
previous signing of the Baghdad Pact by Iraqi’s rulers, convinced many that Iraq was
nothing more than a pawn of the British. Pan-Arabism and Nasserism, while playing a
role in the coup, was not as significant as internal dissatisfaction with Iraq’s leadership.55

On July 14, 1958, General Abd al-Karim Qasim and his group of Free Officers
overthrew the monarchy, executed the royal family and founded a republic. He called it a
"democratic revolution" because he promised to end feudal land-ownership and return
land to the people. He also granted civil liberties to the people, including some freedom

52 See Majid Khadduri, Republican Iraq: A Study in Iraqi Politics Since the Revolution of 1958
53 Jamil, Iraq Before the Revolution, 12.
54 See Hanna Batatu, The Old Social Classes and the Revolutionary Movements of Iraq
55 Peter Sluggett, “The Pan-Arab Movement, Moscow, and Cairo,” in Louis and Owens, A.
Revolutionary Year, 213.
of speech and press, and the right to form trade unions. Qasim declared that Iraq would not involve itself in Cold War alliances, but practice what he described as "positive neutrality." It is clear from his early speeches that Qasim intended to remain independent from any outside influence. He stated:

Countries following a policy of positive neutrality are often described as non-committed. This is an erroneous conception. As far as Iraq is concerned, we are committed to certain principles and policies provided in the Charter of the United Nations. We are committed to fight for freedom and justice in the world, and to assist all subjugated peoples striving to achieve their national rights and liberties. We are committed to cooperate with all those who resist aggression, physically and morally.

Thus, Qasim moved the country away from its pro-West orientation and sought aid from communist countries. This approach placed Iraq well outside of the realm of U.S. control, and since it was difficult to obtain any information on internal events there, one could only base policy on rumor.

For the first two years of his regime, Qasim and his cabinet concentrated on domestic reforms, specifically land, health and social issues. In order to destroy the power of the traditional ruling class, Qasim had to redistribute land to the landless peasants and diminish the power of the wealthy landlords who had supported the Nuri regime. However, as lower agricultural production resulted from land redistribution and social changes proved slow in coming, Qasim decided to use foreign policy issues to distract attention from domestic struggles. A perfect opportunity arose in 1961 when the British granted neighboring Kuwait independence. Qasim renewed an old, Iraqi claim that Kuwait was actually a part of the Iraqi province of Basra, dating back to the Ottoman era. Although he said he would not use force, this rhetoric created a potentially serious

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57 Abdul Karim Qasim, quoted by Qasim Hassan in Iraq Before and After the Revolution, 27.
58 Ibid, 28.
59 Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 168.
problem for the West as Kuwait provided 60 percent of Britain’s oil. Kennedy hoped to keep out of the situation and not intrude on British interests.

Even before Qasim began making belligerent statements, U.S. policy-makers pondered on how Kuwait could maintain its new independence. There was some doubt that surrounding Arab states would see the very small and rich province as legitimate. Some advisors suggested that the U.S. encourage Kuwait to spend some of its oil revenues on development in neighboring Arab states, to help create strong relationships and goodwill. However, by June 1961, Qasim was making alarming public statements about the claim to Kuwait and that Western imperialists wanted to keep the area as a puppet-state. These statements created fear in Kuwait that Iraq might mount an invasion. Kuwait’s ruler Abdullah al-Salim Al-Saba asked for a promise of help, if needed, from the United States. Kennedy’s advisors recommended that the U.S. stay quiet at least at present and let the British handle the situation. The best-case scenario would be if other Arab states came to Kuwait’s defense and forced Qasim to back down. Early word came that Saudi Arabia supported Kuwaiti independence; the Saudis would not like to see Iraq gain further territory, oil revenues, and prestige in the region.

In fact, the United States wanted to stay out of the dispute, as long as Western access to oil of the Persian Gulf was not in danger. Particularly sensitive to Arab accusations of Western imperialism, Kennedy feared a negative reaction from Nasser at a time when that relationship was improving. Sending U.S. troops to Kuwait might damage plans for an even-handed approach to both Arabs and Israelis, as well as any chance to solve such issues as the refugees and Jordan water usage, and of course ultimately, peace between Israel and its neighbors. However, Nasser himself was not

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61 Macomber to Rusk, January 2, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
62 Hart to Rusk, June 26, 1961; MAK to Rusk, June 26, 1961; and Jernegan to Rusk, June 27, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
63 Jernegan to Rusk, June 27, 1961 and Rusk to Hart/MAK, June 27, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
eager for Iraq to grow in strength since Qasim posed as a rival leader of pan-Arabism from time to time.

By late June, Kuwait was so concerned about Iraqi threats that Al-Saba asked for a statement of support from the United States. Kennedy resisted, insisting that he had already recognized Kuwaiti independence and was supporting its application to the United Nations. While appreciative of U.S. caution toward the crisis, the British also wanted American assistance should Iraq actually invade Kuwait.64 During Eisenhower’s administration, the British complained that they sought support in case Iraq invaded Kuwait, but the Americans were not interested. One British official accused American diplomats in Kuwait of keeping to themselves and refusing to share information with their British counterparts.65

In spite of the good relationship between Kennedy and Macmillan, cooperation did not always occur in the field. Kennedy was afraid to associate himself too closely with Britain, a traditional, imperial power, just as rapprochement with Nasser seemed to be going well. As a result, the Americans gave little more than vague assurances as Macmillan made preparations to land troops in Kuwait. The State Department thought that the British were acting precipitously. In public, however, the U.S. was supportive when it became clear that the British were definitely landing troops in Kuwait.66

Meanwhile, Iraq's foreign minister, Hashim Jawad, insisted that discussion of Kuwait did not imply any aggression on Iraq's part. Qasim was simply stating a long-held Iraqi belief and he perhaps could have done it better. "Not everyone has been brought up in the Department of State," he told John Jemegan, American ambassador to Iraq.67 Jawad seemed to be apologizing for Qasim's lack of diplomacy.

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64 Rusk to MAK, June 27, and Home (London) to Rusk, June 28, 1961, FRUS, 17:168.
65 Miriam Joyce, “Preserving the Sheikdom,” 281.
67 Jernegan to Rusk, June 28, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
Still, there was more than rhetoric going on when reports reached Kennedy that Qasim was preparing to reinforce Iraqi troops near the Kuwaiti border. In response, the British began moving ships toward Bahrain and asked the U.S. to request Saudi support. The National Security Council voted to support the U.K. if necessary and informed the British that the United States would place requested pressure on the Saudis. The West held its breath as the Saudis moved troops toward the Iraqi border and Nasser sent promises of support for Kuwaiti independence.

More signs of trouble occurred as reports reached the U.S. that Iraq had attacked Iranian boats carrying produce to Kuwait. Al-Saba officially requested British military assistance to ward off an expected attack from Iraq. The British agreed to send troops, although it hoped to keep the movement low profile. The U.S. worried that Qasim would now feel forced to invade so as not to lose prestige at home and throughout the region, and that such action likely would bring immediate response from both the Saudis and the U.A.R. Neither country wanted Qasim suddenly enriched by oil revenues in excess of $400 million a year. On July 1, the British landed a battalion of troops in Kuwait including tanks and trucks and a squadron of Hunter jets. Kuwaiti radio broadcast messages that the government had requested British troops and that they would leave as soon as the crisis had passed.

Kennedy then surprised the British by offering more than just diplomatic pressure. He also offered to send the "Solent Amity," a small, naval force operating off the coast of East Africa. Macmillan gratefully accepted and the force proceeded toward Kuwait. The British landing went peacefully, however, and Macmillan informed Kennedy that he no

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68 Home to Rusk, June 29, 1961, FRUS, 17:171-2; and Editorial Note, FRUS, 17:172.
70 Rusk, to Cairo, Baghdad, and London Embassies, June 29, 1961; and Bruce (London) to Rusk, June 30, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
71 Circular to Embassies from Rusk, June 30, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
72 Smith to Clifton, June 30, 1961, FRUS, 17:175-176; Jernegan to Rusk; MAK to Rusk; and Bruce (London) to Rusk, July 1, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
longer felt the presence of "Solent Amity" was necessary. Accordingly, it began its usual operations.73

With the British seemingly in control, the U.S. relaxed a little and tried to keep as low a profile as possible. The Saudis, who preferred that the British wait on board ship in the gulf, hoped that UN forces would replace British troops in the near future. U.S. diplomats agreed with the Saudis. Jemegan reported from Baghdad that the crisis was likely over as Qasim was no longer sending threatening messages and that no troops had actually moved toward Kuwait.74 Whatever aims he might have had toward Kuwait, Qasim backed down in the face of Western and Arab criticism. Some historians later asserted that Qasim's rhetoric had never been serious and that the British merely had taken advantage of the situation to reinforce their influence in the region.75

As Qasim reassured various Arab governments that his intentions were peaceful, some countries, including Turkey and Sudan, urged immediate withdrawal of British troops. Under this pressure, the British quickly reduced their presence to only 2,600 troops by mid July and waited for Kuwait to request removal of the rest. This request did not come immediately, because Qasim continued to make public speeches about British imperialism and that Kuwaiti independence threatened the pan-Arab cause. If this were not enough, Qasim began circulating rumors that the U.K. had offered $40 million pounds for him to withdraw his claim for Kuwait, a charge the British naturally denied.76 This would make the replacement of British troops with Arabs all the more urgent. London informed the U.S. that it planned to help train Kuwaiti forces to take over the defense of their own country, but that this project would take at least a year and some Arab forces (preferably U.A.R. troops) would be needed to help in the meantime.77

73 Joyce, "Preserving the Sheikhdom," 288.
74 Hawkins to Rusk, July 4, 1961; and Jemegan to Rusk, July 5; Hare to Rusk, July 6, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
75 See for example Jacob Abadi, "Iraq's Threat to Kuwait During the Qasim Era," in Journal of South Asian and Middle Eastern Studies 22:1 (Fall 1998): 24-45.
76 Jemegan to Rusk, July 6, 15 and 21, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
77 Bruce to Rusk, July 24, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
On the same day, the Arab League voted to support Kuwaiti independence and entry into the Arab League, and called for the immediate withdrawal of British troops. Although the Iraqis stormed out of the meeting in anger, it was clear that the Arab states would provide their own force to support Kuwait. The British now could go home. By mid August, the Arab League had provided a force of 3,500, mostly from the U.A.R. and Saudi Arabia, to replace the British. By mid September, the U.S. had raised its consulate in Kuwait to Embassy status and announced formal diplomatic relations. Qasim's claim to Kuwait ended up alienating Iraq from its Arab neighbors, directly contributing to his eventual overthrow in 1963.

As the year ended, relations with Iraq remained on shaky ground. It appeared that Iraq had cooperated with the Soviets to block Kuwaiti entrance into the United Nations. Qasim accused the British of having something to do with a recent Kurdish uprising in the North. He began quarreling with the Iraq Petroleum Company and took away all undeveloped fields granted to the IPC for future exploration. Even so, advisors counseled Kennedy to not get involved. Talbot wrote:

> From the Iraqi revolution on July 14, 1958 until the new British arrangement with Kuwait on June 19, 1961, the U.S. has followed a policy of patience, tolerance, and scrupulous, nonintervention toward Iraq....we must resist what may be strong pressures intervene...unless it is clear the communists will take over. Our objective is to the best of our ability to avoid pushing Iraq further along its present path.

This statement reflected the prevailing attitude for the near future.

Nonetheless, there continued to be a fear that Qasim's actions might draw the U.S. into an uncomfortable position of having to defend Kuwait. Kennedy continued to encourage Al-Saba to establish his right as a viable, independent state by cultivating good

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78 Strong to Talbot, July 24, 1961; and MAK to Rusk, August 13, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
79 Khadduri, Republican Iraq, 172. For more information on the Kuwaiti crisis, see also Miriam Joyce, “Preserving the Sheikdom,” 281-292.
80 Talbot to Ball, December 18, 1961, FRUS, 17: 364-366.
relations with his neighbors. Continued dependence on the British for security would only prove Qasim's argument and create insecure feelings among his recent Arab supporters. Jemegan told Rusk "the West can no longer afford the present policy of reliance on British military protection...for greedy, short-sighted Shaikhs." 81 He and others were clearly frustrated with Al-Saba's reluctance to rid himself of British support, while continuing to insist on his complete independence. Some of the American frustration stemmed from conflicts the Sheik was having with Nasser over U.A.R. security troops sent to Kuwait. The dispute moved Nasser to withdraw his contingent from the area and leave Al-Saba to fend for himself. 82 Kennedy continued to pressure Kuwait to provide monetary aid for some Arab projects.

By the end of his first year in office, Kennedy could be cautiously optimistic about at least the second prong of his "three-pronged plan" for the Middle East. Rapprochement with Egypt was well underway and tough issues such as the legitimacy of the state of Israel had been "put in the ice-box" by both Nasser and Kennedy. Plans for long-term aid were under development to assist this rapprochement and draw Nasser gently away from the communist bloc. Even potentially unstable Syria was friendly and received American dollars for development. Relations with Iraq remained anything but warm, but Kennedy at least had avoided a potential crisis with that state. If he maintained the status quo in the region, he could begin working on the third prong of his plan: a settlement of the Arab refugee crisis.

A problem with this set of circumstances was that policy-makers took promises of reform by Syrian leaders and the Kuwaiti Emir at face value. Perhaps they had no other choice, from their perspective. However, the American interest in containing the power of Qasim and Nasser allowed Syria and Kuwait to parlay American concerns into large amounts of no-strings-attached aid.

81 Jemegan to Rusk, December 28, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
82 Jemegan to Rusk, December 29, 1961, NSF 129, JFKL.
CHAPTER 5

THE PALESTINE REFUGEE ISSUE

As part of the "Three-pronged plan" for peace and security in the Middle East, the Palestinian refugee crisis was an issue central to Kennedy's policy. He believed that no progress toward peace between Israel and Arab states would be achieved without some movement on this problem. There were nearly 1.5 million refugees in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Lebanon, Jordan, and Syria when Kennedy took office.\(^1\) Resettling the refugees, Kennedy believed, would take away a major obstacle to Arab recognition of Israel's right to exist. Any long-term progress would thus begin here. This "prong" was central to the administration's policy toward Israel, at least at the beginning of Kennedy's term of office. The focus would later shift, but all efforts centered on the refugees during 1961 and a good part of 1962. No less than Eisenhower, Kennedy refused to consider the refugees as any kind of separate national entity. This failure would prevent any real success on this topic until the 1990s.\(^2\)

The Johnson Mission

Discussions regarding the refugees were already ongoing in the UN General Assembly in early 1961 and Kennedy would have to decide the U.S. position on a number of issues. First, the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA)

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would cease to exist after June of 1963 unless someone made a move for its renewal. At least 70% of the funding for UNRWA came from the United States. Staff members informed Kennedy that unless it made some real progress soon, Congress was unlikely to continue the funding. Secondly, Kennedy would have to decide what sort of American initiative he would launch to act as broker between Israel and the Arab states. There was already a UN Conciliation Commission for Palestine through which Kennedy could work if he so chose.

Although preoccupied with other issues at the beginning of his term, Kennedy began immediately to discuss the subject of the refugees with Middle East leaders. Although Israel refused to consider even the possibility of repatriation, Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir at least did listen politely. Responses to Kennedy's letter on May 11 to heads of all Arab states, although mixed, were generally favorable toward any new U.S. initiative toward solving the refugee crisis. In his letter, Kennedy made it clear that he believed a solution to the refugee issue was a prerequisite for peace in the region. He voiced his intentions to work toward a solution for the refugees and hoped that regional leaders would cooperate with his initiative. Although the British were skeptical about such a move and tried to discourage Kennedy, his advisors thought that the time was ripe for action.

As a beginning point for this policy, Adlai Stevenson, US Ambassador to the UN, talked about the refugees with Ben Gurion in June. Stevenson suggested that they could

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3 Bowles to Kennedy, April 28, 1961, FRUS, 17:91.
5 Rusk to Kennedy, July 13, 1961, FRUS, 17:187-193; see also Kennedy's May 11, 1961 letter to Nasser and Nasser's August 22, 1961 response, found in For the Sake of Truth and for History: The Palestinian Problem, Correspondence Exchanged Between President Gamal Abdel-Nasser and President John Kennedy (Information Department, Indiana University Library).
6 Bruce to Rusk, May 12, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
make progress if Israel were willing to consider a plan that combined balanced repatriation to Israel and Arab host nations, some compensation, and a long-term timetable. Ben-Gurion's response was very negative. He argued that repatriation would place Israeli security at risk and that only a final peace settlement would bring a solution to the refugee issue. He also reiterated that if both the U.S. and U.S.S.R. would issue a statement guaranteeing Israel's boundaries, it might encourage a peace agreement. What Kennedy and his advisors did not fully understand was that Ben-Gurion, with his "iron wall" mentality, would never agree to repatriation of refugees or giving up any land. Almost from the beginning, these negotiations were doomed because of Israeli intransigence. Security was more important (i.e. land and a Jewish population) than peace with its neighbors.

For their part, the Arab nations had specific proposals regarding refugees that they were preparing for UN debate. Early on, Arab leaders informed Kennedy that they were not only supportive of the continuation of UNRWA (with some changes), but were also advocating what they called a "custodial plan." This plan called for the United Nations to take custody of Arab holdings inside Israel to protect refugee assets from usurpation by the Israelis. The United States immediately opposed this idea as unfeasible and hoped to direct Arab attention toward the idea of a balanced agreement between repatriation and resettlement.

7 Stevenson to Rusk, June 2, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
8 For a description of how Israel refused to seriously negotiate for peace with its neighbors, see Jon Kimche, There Could Have Been Peace (NY: The Dial Press, 1973).
9 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, April 15, 1961, FRUS, 17:83-85.
The State Department already had supported a UN proposal to send a Special Representative to the Middle East to make a report on the refugees.\textsuperscript{10} Even though a representative from neutral Switzerland was at first suggested, the eventual representative was (in order to please Israel) an American named Dr. Joseph E. Johnson of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. The plan called for Johnson to make some initial visits to the Middle East, to examine the current work of the PCC and UNRWA, and make proposals no later than October 15, 1961 for the General Assembly.\textsuperscript{11} The President appointed Johnson in late August and he immediately set about his task.

Meanwhile, debate over the refugees continued between the State Department and the various Middle East Embassies. An issue connected to the refugees was a group of Palestinians who wanted recognition as an official UN delegation. Arab states supported this proposal.\textsuperscript{12} In the end, the U.S. would agree with Israel that they could not recognize a delegation from the Arab refugees as representative of all. Therefore, it would only deal with the refugees on an individual basis. In addition, most of Kennedy's advisors believed that only a personality like the President's would make any headway toward a resolution. Beyond that recognition, it was difficult to form a consensus. Some suggested the resettlement of 200,000 refugees into Syria; others thought Jordan would be more appropriate.\textsuperscript{13} Some argued that any agreement must call for gradual repatriation for Israel's sake, others talked about the importance of pleasing the Arabs. Ambassador Hart in Saudi Arabia argued that any plan must look like an Arab victory after their

\textsuperscript{10} Rusk to Stevenson, May 4, 1961, FRUS, 17:96-98.
\textsuperscript{11} Editorial Note, FRUS, 17:221-2; and Switzerland Embassy to Rusk, June 12, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{12} Memorandum for Kennedy, no date, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{13} Rusk to Middle East Embassies, November 7, 1961; and Strong: Memorandum of Meeting, August 3, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.

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humiliation in 1956. "We can't buy our way out, but must restore Arab dignity," he argued. How to accomplish these goals would be the challenge.

Johnson soon reported his initial assessments of the refugee issue. Some of the major problems, he pointed out, included "genuine fear" on both sides toward the other, insistence that the refugee issue and the Palestine Question as a whole could not be separated, and ignorance as to the preferences of the refugees themselves. Johnson also believed that even with some kind of plan calling for gradual resettlement and repatriation, one he supported, the refugee problem would continue to exist for at least another fifteen years. This made the continuation of UNRWA or something very like it, imperative. Johnson also reported specific indications from U.A.R. Foreign minister Mahmoud Fawzi that Egypt would work with him on a systematic plan if Israel were willing to talk about repatriation. He agreed that the PCC should allow the refugees to choose resettlement or repatriation. With this word from the strongest Arab state in the region, Johnson felt encouraged. He then requested that the UN appoint a permanent PCC representative and extend UNRWA for at least two years.

It would not be an easy road for Johnson. Unlike Egypt, Israel was completely opposed to the idea of "free choice" for the refugees. To make matters even more complicated, Arab delegates to the UN began arguing that any refugees who had lived in the areas designated for an Arab state by the United Nations resolution of 1947 should be automatically repatriated. Only those from the Jewish partition needed an option. In response, the Knesset voted a resolution on November 6 that they would not accept any

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14 Editorial Note, FRUS, 17:211.
15 Stevenson to Rusk, September 27, 1961, NSF Box 148. JFKL.
16 Stevenson to Rusk, October 6 and 7, 1961, NSF Box 148. JFKL.
refugees for repatriation and that an offer to repatriate 100,000, proposed in 1949, was no longer valid. Israel feared that children who had grown up in the refugee camps would now return as "soldiers indoctrinated with hatred for Israel."\footnote{Barbour to Rusk, November 1, 1961; and Stevenson to Rusk, November 1, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.} The U.S. was unhappy at Israel's inflexibility and continued to pressure Israel to accept some compromise regarding the refugees.

Upon the receipt of Johnson's report, Rusk sent a long memo to Kennedy, analyzing the current situation and warning him that the UN debate would be a tough one. He restated Johnson's findings: that both sides showed "guarded willingness" to consider a systematic approach on the refugees, and that a permanent Special Representative should be appointed. The important thing, Rusk insisted, was for the U.S. to appear a neutral broker in any resulting negotiations or agreements. To do this, the U.S. planned to oppose an Arab resolution advocating a UN custodian for Arab properties in Israel, as well as an Israeli proposal to open direct peace negotiations.\footnote{Barbour to Rusk, November 7, 1961; and Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, November 14, 1961 NSF Box 148, JFKL.} He hoped that by opposing proposals from both sides, the U.S. would appear neutral. In a subsequent conversation with Golda Meir, Rusk explained American intentions on the UN debate. Meir was upset that the U.S. planned to vote against the Israeli proposal and tried to convince Rusk of its benefit. She also voiced her doubt that the Johnson Mission would ever accomplish anything, but promised to go along with the plan "only because the United States felt so strongly about it."\footnote{Rusk to Kennedy, November 26, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL.}
On December 4, the debate on the refugees began and as it had promised, the U.S. voted against both Arab and Israeli proposals because in Kennedy's view, they represented extremes. Although reactions in the Assembly were calm, most of the Arab countries, particularly Jordan, were very angry at the American action. They believed that American opposition to the "Custodial" proposition showed a strong Israeli bias.\(^2\)

However, all agreed that the PCC continue with a Special Representative. The U.S. wanted Johnson to remain in that position and during early 1962, he began sounding out Arab and Israeli feelings on the subject.

Although Kennedy continued to receive mixed signals from Israel, he did receive early reassurances in 1962 that they would cooperate with Johnson if his mission continued. The U.S. soon realized, however, that the only real value in the project was to demonstrate to the world that lack of progress on the refugee issue was because of Arab or Israeli intransigence.\(^2\) Kennedy hoped that the mission, at the very least, would prove that the United States had done all it could, to place the blame for failure either upon Arab or Israeli heads, or both.\(^2\) The Arabs were also anxious to appear cooperative, and did agree to continue to work with Johnson, as long as Paragraph 11 of the 1948 UN Resolution 194 (calling for repatriation of the refugees) was the basis of any agreement.

With all sides willing to continue, Johnson began preparations for the second stage of negotiations. He wanted to begin by visiting heads-of-state in the Spring to explore such issues as whether to deal with the refugees camp-by-camp, or in some other

\(^2\) Rusk to Macomber, December 25, 1961, FRUS, 17:371-373.
\(^2\) Bingham (USUN) to Rusk, January 11, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\(^2\) Stevenson to Rusk, January 16, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
fashion, and how the PCC could go about determining refugee preferences. However, before Johnson could begin his work, a disruption in Congress threatened to derail the plan, an example of the Jewish Lobby at work. Congressman Leonard Farbstein of New York was angry that in December, the U.S. delegation at the UN had voted against the Israeli proposal to open direct peace negotiations. He had then brought before the Foreign Affairs Committee a resolution "stating the sense of Congress that the United States Delegation to the United Nations should favor direct Israeli-Arab peace negotiations." Rusk wrote to him explaining the impact this resolution would have upon the Johnson Mission and urged him to withdraw it.

In the end, Farbstein agreed, even though he thought the Johnson mission useless, and asked that the Secretary look into discrimination by Jordan against American Jews. Rusk agreed to see what he could do about the situation. Throughout the rest of early spring, Johnson continued to discuss possible approaches to Israel and the Arab states with England, France, and various Jewish leaders in the United States. Officials in London were supportive, although not very optimistic, and he found similar attitudes in Paris. One problem many American Jewish leaders brought up was levels of immigration Israel expected from Eastern European countries.

Roadblocks to Settlement

After sounding out these various sources, Johnson outlined, in somewhat vague terms, what he intended to present to Middle East countries in his "second round" visit.

24 Memorandum of Conversation-PCC, January 17, 1962, FRUS, 17:409-410; Stevenson to Rusk, January 16, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
25 Talbot to Rusk, February 2, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
He hoped he could talk both sides into dealing with a limited number of refugees, perhaps twenty thousand, and a limited period of one year. Then, through canvassing for refugee preference, this number would repatriate and resettle, with some compensation paid to help refugees get a fresh start. He would also have to find an agreed-upon method of determining preferences, perhaps by using several UN centers that would move from one country to another. Johnson hoped to create a test case by using a small number and a limited time-period, and that its success might inspire future repatriation/resettlement efforts. The State Department estimated that the total cost of complete solution of the refugee issue would be somewhere between $1-$2 billion dollars and take at least 10-15 years. Still, Johnson believed that by keeping the effort at a limited, experimental level, he could make the plan workable and avoid all-or-nothing stands by both Israel and Arabs.

Others had similar hopes, as American Ambassador to Lebanon Armin Meyer indicated in a telegram in March 1962. He wrote that the time was ripe for progress on the refugee problem. He cited an Arab awareness that "reoccupation of Palestine is [a] more remote prospect than ever," that Johnson was an easy man to work with, and that the Kennedy administration was sincerely trying to "maintain balance in relations with Arab and Israel." Adding caution to his optimism, he pointed out several key obstacles to settlement on the Arab side: inter-Arab quarrels over ideology, pan-Arabism, and the need to not appear soft toward Israel. Talbot was also cautious. He observed that both sides had hidden agendas; namely that the Israelis wanted to pretend to cooperate while

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26 Memorandum of Conversation, Rusk, Farbstein, Strong, Coblentz, February 13, 1962, FRUS, 17:468-469.
27 Memorandum of Conversation, New York, March 14, 1962, FRUS, 17:525-527.
28 Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, April 6, 1962, FRUS, 17:579.
secretly thwarting the plan, and Arab leaders were trying to appear cooperative so they
would not be blamed for any failure.30

Before Johnson left for his second trip, he was careful to instruct the State
Department that he wanted no special treatment from American officials. To appear as
neutral as possible, he requested that embassy personnel not meet him at airports.31 He
arrived in Israel on April 14 and began a round of talks, sending back frequent reports via
the U.S. embassies. He had three meetings with Meir about the refugees and found all
unsatisfactory. Meir insisted that no one could expect Israel to accept Arabs without some
kind of assurance of peace, if not a peace treaty, from its neighbors. She also indicated
that Israel would want a "six months moratorium on anti-Israeli propaganda" as evidence
of this peace.32

Although they were not a complete failure, Johnson left the meetings in Israel
discouraged. Meir had been uncooperative and continued to insist that the refugees were a
security risk to Israel, and that they were ultimately an Arab responsibility. Johnson
hoped for a better reception in Arab states. As he made his rounds, reports trickled into
the State Department describing his efforts. The Syrians received him respectfully, but
were unwilling to accept his limit of 20,000 refugees as a first step. They were afraid that
Israel would use such small numbers, even if intended as a start, as an excuse to claim it
had done its part.33 The Syrians thought that perhaps an annual quota system that would
keep the number low each year, but not limit the rights of repatriation to a certain section
of refugees, might be acceptable.

29 Meyer to Rusk, March 23, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
30 Talbot to Rusk, April 10, 1962, FRUS, 17:584.
31 Memorandum of Conversation, Washington, April 6, 1962, FRUS, 17:577-578.
32 Consulate General Scott (Jerusalem) to Rusk, April 18, 1962, FRUS, 17:635-36.

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In the U.A.R., Nasser voiced his concern that Israel would treat the repatriated Arab refugees as "second-class citizens." However, he did indicate that he appreciated Kennedy's efforts to balance the American relationship between Israel and Arab states, and assured Johnson that any military conflict with Israel was "not on the agenda." 34 Talks with Jordan were also civil, but Foreign Minister Nuseibeh was very pessimistic about the Johnson Mission. He argued that while Johnson hoped to isolate the refugee issue in order to make progress, he should do nothing in isolation from the rest of the larger "Palestine Question." Talks in Lebanon brought up similar issues and concerns, but a willingness to cooperate with whatever the Arab countries agreed to.35 Still, it was clear to Johnson that there was no agreement, except that significant repatriation was mandatory to Arabs, and that resettlement was the only option in Israeli minds.

In the meantime, rumors surfaced that threatened to make Johnson's task even more difficult. Word reached the State Department in late April that the Jordanian government was discussing a possible "plan for recovery of Palestine" or perhaps the recognition of a government-in-exile.36 Then, more rumors surfaced that some Arab leaders were accusing the U.S. of paying Nasser and King Saud huge amounts of money to be quiet on the refugee issue.37 The Saudi Arabian press began to report that the U.S. had paid Nasser to keep the Gulf of Aqaba open to Israeli shipping.38 All of these rumors threatened to derail the Johnson Mission since Arab countries were very anxious not to

33 Badeau to Rusk, April 30, 1962, FRUS, 17:649-650.
34 Anscheutz (Cairo) to Rusk, May 3, 1962, FRUS, 17:657.
35 Scott (Jerusalem) to Rusk, May 8 and 11, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
36 Knight to Rusk, April 27, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
37 Macomber to Rusk, May 1, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
38 Ball to Middle East Embassies, May 4, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
appear to be giving in to Western pressure or making deals with Israel. Johnson would be walking through mine fields throughout the mission.

After meeting with Arab leaders, Johnson returned to Israel before going home. This time, he met with both Meir and Ben-Gurion and tried to explain his plans. Although the concept of 20,000 would not work for the Arabs, he still hoped some canvassing for refugee preferences could be done and some other system of gradual repatriation or resettlement be agreed upon. He told the Israelis that he believed the Arabs would agree to some kind of plan along these lines. Once again, however, Johnson found the Israelis intransigent. Ben-Gurion asserted that Israel "had no moral obligation to help solve the refugee problem" but that Israel would help if all agreed to a plan. Israel would not agree with the principle of "free choice" for the refugees. Johnson left the meeting frustrated, but not without some hope. Johnson would continue, it was clear, to avoid blame for the mission's failure.

Returning home, Johnson reported that he felt the Mission should continue and he had some hope of success. Even though he had to drop his idea of an initial group of 20,000, he thought there were options to consider. Meanwhile, the Kennedy administration continued to believe that a solution to the Refugee Crisis was one of its most important policy goals, and gave Johnson continued support. Rusk believed, as did many others, that it was vitally important to try to make progress before Israel began withdrawal of water from the Jordan River in 1963 or 1964.

40 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, June 8, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL; State Department Policy Paper, June 30, 1962; and Rusk to Kennedy, August 7, 1962, FRUS, 17:762-764.
The HAWK Connection

On August 7, Johnson presented his plan to key U.S. officials and it began to make its rounds within the Kennedy Administration and members of the United Nations’ PCC. The plan began by stating the various aims of the Johnson Mission and the reasons why solving the refugee issue would be an important first-step toward peace in the region. The plan was fairly simple: it called for the appointment of officials by the UN to work under the PCC umbrella to canvass the refugees to determine their preferences, and then for officials to begin negotiations with the countries involved to see if the preference could be carried out. Then hopefully, the refugee in question would begin a new life with some monetary help from the UN back in Israel, or in an Arab host country.  

Johnson attached to the plan an "Explanation" designed to clarify certain points. It stated that the UN would be the arbiter and guarantor of refugee rights, and that refugees would voluntarily apply for consideration in the process on a first-come-first-serve basis. It also clearly stated that Israel would be the final determinant of how many to accept for repatriation, and placed no number restrictions on any part of the process. Talbot suggested that the U.S. give Ben-Gurion a secret ceiling on the number of repatriates in order to gain Israeli acceptance of the plan.  

There is no evidence that anyone made such an offer.

In late spring of 1962, Israel began protesting what it saw as a developing rapprochement of American policy toward all Arab states, to the detriment of Israeli security. Meeting Komer in April, Mordechai Gazit, an Israeli minister at the embassy in Washington, D.C., argued that Kennedy was pressuring Israel to ignore real security

41 Johnson Plan, NSF Box 118, JFKL.
42 Talbot to Feldman, August 9, 1962, NSF Box 118, JFKL.
issues (i.e. effect of repatriation of refugees, the Sea of Galilee, and U.S. rapprochement with Nasser) without any assurance of American support in a crisis. He argued that Israel needed a written guarantee of a military alliance with the United States in order to insure its long-term security. Gazit even suggested this guarantee could be a secret letter, but implied that such a gesture would assist U.S.-Israeli relations considerably.

A month later, Deputy Defense Minister Shimon Peres made it clear just what kind of assurance Israel would find helpful. Even though the diplomats made no direct mention of the on-going Johnson refugee negotiations in conversations requesting increased military aid from the U.S., the timing was significant. Perez reiterated Gazit's argument for a written guarantee that the United States would aid Israel in times of crisis. He argued that Israel was feeling more isolated in the Middle East and that recent American votes in the UN had encouraged Arab states toward belligerence against Israel. If Kennedy did not do something specific to counter this situation, the Arabs would likely feel bold enough to attack Israel. To remedy this situation, Perez requested some kind of guarantee, but at the very least, the sale of more military equipment to Israel including SONAR (Sound, Navigation and Ranging) early warning equipment, and perhaps HAWK anti-aircraft missiles.

Israel had continued to insist since the Eisenhower administration that in order to counter Soviet MIG jets sold to Egypt, Israel needed the HAWK defensive, anti-aircraft missile to maintain military parity. Both Eisenhower and Kennedy had refused earlier requests to prevent any kind of accelerated arms race in the Middle East and instead encouraged Israel to purchase weapons from France. This would keep Israel secure while

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43 Memorandum: Komer and Gazit Meeting, April 30, 1962, NSF, Box 119, JFKL.
44 See also oral histories from Komer and Gazit, Strober, Let Us Begin Anew, 230.
allowing the United States to maintain the appearance of neutrality. Now, however, Israel argued that Egypt and Syria received comparable missiles from the Soviets and that HAWKS would merely even up the score. William Bundy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, made the assessment in May that Israel did not need the HAWK to counter any Arab military equipment.46

The truth was that Israel purchased a sufficient supply of weapons from France and other European sources. This raises the question as to why Israel made requests for HAWK missiles. Some scholars argue that Israel merely sought a closer security relationship with the United States and that a sale of missiles would be a symbolic guarantee of its security. To persuade Kennedy to approve the sale, Israel sought to portray its military situation as weakened by recent acquisitions of weapons by Egypt.47 American policy-makers in the departments of Defense and State came to believe the Israeli arguments and began to argue in support of a sale.48

Conversations between Peres and McGeorge Bundy led to State Department evaluations regarding the HAWK request and Israel. Throughout the spring and summer of 1962, the State Department continued to argue that selling HAWKS at this stage would create more problems than benefits. Others, like Komer, began to toy with the possibility of using a sale as leverage to convince Israel to agree to the Johnson refugee plan.49 Talbot argued that giving in on the HAWK issue would simply encourage less cooperation from both Israel and Arab states. As far as a written guarantee of Israel's

46 Ibid., 674.
47 David Tal, "Symbol not Substance?," 253-504.
48 Memorandum of Conversation, May 6, 1961, FRUS, 17:102-3; and Talbot to Rusk, May 1, 1961, FRUS, 17: 94; See also Cheryl Rubenberg, Israel and the American National Interest (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986): 90-91.
security was concerned, the most the State Department would agree to would be a re-activation of the 1950 Tripartite Agreement, which guaranteed borders and security to regional states, but also limited American arms sales to all. This was not what Israel had in mind.

While the conversation on HAWKS went on between departments, refugee negotiations continued. Kennedy wrote Ben-Gurion in June to encourage Israel to preserve peaceful relations with its Arab neighbors and to assure him that the U.S. supported Israeli plans to draw water from the Jordan in the near future. This timely assurance might have been an attempt to deflect Israeli demands for the HAWK and encourage acquiescence in the Johnson negotiations. Ben-Gurion replied that Israel intended to follow the Eric Johnston plan for water usage, but restated the standard Israeli positions on repatriation of refugees and belligerence of Arab neighbors. Pressure from Israel continued as the State Department asked the Defense Department for an assessment of Israeli military needs.

All this conversation on the HAWK issue produced shock in London. The British were astounded to learn the U.S. was even considering the possibility of selling HAWKS to Israel and demanded that Kennedy keep them informed of the situation, both as an ally and as a possible source of such missiles. Kennedy promised that he would inform the British of any change in U.S. policy and continued to resist the idea of the sale. By the end of June, however, some slight modification on the State and Defense Departments'
policy occurred. Both had by that time agreed that if the Israelis were right about Arab states obtaining missiles from the Soviets, the U.S. would have legitimate reason to sell the HAWK to Israel. 54 Both the State and Defense Departments were looking for excuses to sell the missiles to Israel. Many diplomats perceived this transaction as leverage in the refugee negotiations, as Komer did.

At the end of June the State Department issued a policy paper identifying the most pressing issues of U.S.-Middle East policy. First on the list was the refugee crisis. The authors re-stated the priority of resolving this issue and American support for the Johnson and the PCC Mission. They mentioned incidents on the Sea of Galilee as points of concern, along with the Jordan water project, the Dimona reactor, and the continuing Arab boycott of Israel. 55 State made no mention of the HAWK issue, however. The Kennedy administration continued to believe that selling missiles to Israel would be a mistake.

In July 1962, Talbot again sent a long report on U.S.-Israeli relations to Rusk, reiterating his views that the U.S. should not increase its "military relationship" with Israel. Talbot was concerned that Kennedy would yield to Israeli pressure over a written assurance of support and the HAWK missiles. He argued that such moves would damage the careful progress achieved with Arab states in the region. Talbot urged the U.S. take advantage of a time when Soviet influence was weak and focus on Arab states. 56 Any HAWK missile sale would damage this progress. Talbot left little doubt that he placed Israeli demands at the bottom of the priority list for Middle East policy.

54 Memorandum of Conversation, June 20, 1962, FRUS, 17:739-40; and Komer to Bundy, June 22, 1962, NSF Box 119, JFKL.
56 Talbot to Rusk, July 9, 1962, FRUS, 18:2-7.
One week later, the Defense Department sent Kennedy a report on the probable impact of HAWK missiles on Israel. In the report, William Bundy argued that recent sales of Soviet TU-16 aircraft to Egypt did place Israel in a vulnerable position. He recommended the sale of approximately 288 HAWK missiles and requisite training and equipment at an estimated cost of nearly 8.5 million dollars. Bundy argued that the sale "would not alone act to shift the balance of military power between Israel and its neighbors." 57 Less than a month later, Rusk reported to Kennedy that he had changed his mind on the sale of HAWKS. Evidence that the Soviets were likely supplying Egypt with missiles rang louder in Rusk's ear than Talbot's words of caution. While reluctant to supply HAWKS to Israel, Rusk conceded that if no arms limitation were likely in the next few months, perhaps the U.S. should sell Israel the weapons, since they were primarily defensive. Even though Rusk continued to urge that the U.S. "avoid establishing any type of special military relationship with Israel," he did appear to have listened more to the Defense Department arguments than to those from his own Middle East desk. 58

Perhaps accepting the inevitable, Talbot wrote Myer Feldman a few days later, urging that Kennedy use the potential HAWK sale to extract cooperation from Ben-Gurion over the refugees. Talbot argued that Ben-Gurion was confident he would get the HAWKS, so why not really threaten him that such a sale would be contingent upon cooperation with the Johnson Plan? Kennedy might as well get something in return for such a concession. A few days later, Feldman wrote the President, suggesting that he use the HAWK sale to pressure Israel to an agreement on the refugees. 59 Komer issued a

57 W. Bundy to Grant, July 16, 1962, FRUS, 18:8-9.
58 Rusk to Kennedy, August 7, 1962, FRUS, 18:27-32.
59 Talbot to Feldman, August 9, 1962; and Feldman to Kennedy, August 10, 1962, NSF, Box 119, JFKL.
cautionary memo to Kennedy regarding Israeli aggression toward its neighbors, but the course already was set. The U.S. announced the sale of HAWKS to Israel on August 19, 1962.\footnote{Komer to Kennedy, August 14, 1962, POF, box 119a, JFKL; Rusk to London Embassy, August 17, 1962, NSF Box 119, JFKL. Robert Komer would later state that he believed Feldman talked Kennedy into the HAWK missile sale, that he “was simply a tool of the Israelis.” Interview with Robert Komer, in Strober, Let Us Begin Anew: 230.}

The sale pleased the Jewish-American community, but Britain was not amused.\footnote{Letters of support from: Seymour Halpern to Kennedy, August 21, 1962; Louis Segal of the Labor Zionist Order to Feldman, August 21, 1962; Michael Lerner of the College Age Organization of the United Synagogue of America to Kennedy, September 3, 1962; Rabbi Irving Miller to Feldman, September 13, 1962, all in WHCOF, box 60, JFKL.} At Kennedy’s suggestion, the British had been talking for some time about selling the Bloodhound missile to Israel. Now the promise of American HAWKS made the British missile irrelevant. When the British responded angrily, Kennedy instructed Feldman to explain to the British how necessary the HAWK sale was to obtaining Israeli acquiescence on the Johnson Refugee plan. The British, however, were unhappy and Macmillan voiced his anger at how he felt the United States treated British interests carelessly, just because they could.\footnote{Bundy to Kennedy, August 19, 1962, and Grant to Rusk, August 20, 1962, NSF Box 119, JFKL.} This action, however, would not severely damage the U.S.-U.K. relationship and it would face bigger challenges over Yemen. Now Kennedy waited to see if the HAWK would achieve its objective.

Almost immediately, Kennedy sent Myer Feldman to negotiate with Ben-Gurion over the Johnson Plan. Rusk instructed Feldman:

I hardly need stress that it would be most unfortunate if Israelis were to end up with the Hawks and strengthened security assurances while being responsible for derailing the Johnson Plan before it could even be given a good try.\footnote{Rusk to Feldman, August 20, 1962, FRUS, 18:66-67.}
While the U.S. tried to persuade Ben-Gurion to cooperate on the refugee issue, talks with Nasser were also positive. Contrary to warnings about negative Arab reactions, Nasser's response to the HAWK sale was mild.\textsuperscript{64} He even sounded positive about the Johnson Plan, and by September 1962, it seemed that the strategy of the HAWK might in fact come to fruition.

On September 10, the U.S. officially presented the text of the Johnson Plan to Israel and Arab states and everyone sat back and waited for reactions. Four days later, the U.S. officially announced its plans to make HAWK missiles available for possible sale to Israel.\textsuperscript{65} The announcement made no mention of the Johnson Plan, but Kennedy hoped that Israel would now "give" him something in return by approving the plan. Such was not to be, however. On September 14, the same day the U.S. officially announced the HAWK sale, Israel voted against the Johnson Plan in its entirety. When the Israelis received the written document, they claimed that it was significantly different from what both Kennedy and Feldman had proposed. They stated that they had in fact been "betrayed" and that the plan was "stacked against Israel."\textsuperscript{66} Ben-Gurion was angry that it did not state that Israel would have the ultimate decision on how many refugees to repatriate. Instead, he argued, the UN was to be the ultimate arbiter, which violated Israel's sovereignty.

At first, these protests made it appear that some final revisions Johnson had made had changed an earlier agreement between Feldman and Israel. Israel thus accused the U.S. of a "breach of faith." However, as Talbot observed, Israel did not attempt to talk to

\textsuperscript{64} Badeau to Rusk, August 24, 1962, FRUS, 18:74-77.
\textsuperscript{65} Rusk to Middle East Embassies, September 14, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{66} Talbot to Rusk, September 20, 1962, FRUS, 18:112-116.
Johnson about the questionable wording before the announcement of its rejection. Talbot concluded that Israel never intended to accept any refugee solution (which was indeed the case). They had simply not expected any plan to get this far. Feldman urged that Kennedy "disengage" from the Johnson Plan before it caused too much political damage, but Komer and others began arguing vehemently that this was the very thing they had worried about. In an almost "I-told-you-so" manner, Komer lamented that Israel had succeeded in getting what it wanted - the HAWKS - without having to give anything in return on the refugees or any other issue. This fact, in his view, represented a complete failure of American policy, in large measure because of the State department's inability to use toughness in negotiations.

For a few months longer, the U.S. continued to support the Johnson Plan and urged Israeli and Arab cooperation with it. Yet, it was already clear to Komer and others that the plan was dead. He nonetheless argued that the U.S. should continue to verbally support the plan to avoid taking the blame for its failure and ruining any remaining chance of appearing neutral in the Arab-Israeli struggle.

Fixing the Blame

It also was clear to some analysts that once Israel had the HAWKS promised, they no longer felt it necessary to cooperate with Kennedy on the refugee issue. The question was what would he do about the situation. There were several issues at stake. If the Arab countries found out the U.S. had abandoned the plan because of Israeli rejection and then

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67 Shepard to Kennedy, September 21, 1962, POF box 119a, JFKL; Komer to Kaysen, September 22, 1962, NSF box 119, JFKL.
68 Komer to Kaysen, September 29, 1962, NSF Box 119, JFKL.
69 Komer to Kaysen, September 22, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
discovered the HAWK sale, Kennedy's attempt to establish a balanced approach in the Middle East would lose all meaning.

At first, there was hope that with some persuasion, Israel might change its mind. The State Department outlined a proposal for personal negotiations between the U.S. and Israel that would include Kennedy himself.\(^\text{70}\) If all this effort should fail, the U.S. should seek some way to make the Arabs take the blame. This would be preferable to Israel taking the blame, because Arab states would then blame Kennedy for siding with Israel. Komer stated that somehow Kennedy should "seek to give up a negative Arab reaction as quickly as possible, adding that it was "going to take some doing, in order not to be too transparent."\(^\text{71}\) Now the U.S. was scrambling to keep from taking the blame for the inevitable failure of the Johnson Plan.

As the weeks passed, there was less and less hope that Israel would change its mind. Rusk talked at length with Golda Meir in New York, and argued that Israel should not worry about its security, especially after receiving the HAWK missiles. Meir continued to insist that there was no way any further work by Johnson would be useful.\(^\text{72}\) Most officials agreed that the U.S. should not abandon the Johnson Plan just yet, but try to allow the Arabs to take the blame, or at the very least, put it on Israel. The State Department continued to endorse the plan, hoping to place the blame for failure elsewhere.

\(^{\text{70}}\) Talbot to Rusk, no date, NSF Box 148, JFKL; Talbot to Rusk, September 25, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.

\(^{\text{71}}\) Komer to Kaysen, September 25, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.

\(^{\text{72}}\) Talbot to Rusk, September 20, 1961, NSF Box 148, JFKL; and Rusk to State Department, September 26, 1962, FRUS, 18:134.
Some State Department officials were angry at Israel and believed that it had manipulated Kennedy. Talbot for one argued, "Israel has recently obtained from us all that it now wants...and now feels it can safely be adamant."\(^73\) He also thought, however, that the U.S. should keep pressing Israel and that perhaps it had not forced Israel to its "fall-back position" yet. He firmly believed that the Johnson Plan was the only chance for the near future for any kind of movement in Palestine and that Kennedy should not abandon it completely. The plan would continue to float through the rest of 1962.

It was clear by early October, however, that while talks about the refugees might continue, there would be no "Johnson Plan." Israel had rejected the plan out-right, but the U.S. and Israel kept this fact quiet so they would not be accused of derailing the plan. Finally, Arab replies arrived and were mostly negative.\(^74\) This took the pressure off and now the U.S. could argue that while it had done its best under the circumstances, both sides had rejected the American proposal.\(^75\)

Now it was time to decide how to handle the issue in the UN General Assembly. As scheduled, discussions resumed on the refugee issue in November. Before the meeting, U.S. officials negotiated with Israel and Johnson regarding how much detail would be given in the latter's report. Word that the old Israeli resolution for direct peace negotiations was being re-circulated upset the State Department which thought it had obtained Israel's agreement not to introduce it.\(^76\) The U.S. sought reassurance that Israel would not support such a resolution. Rusk suggested that the U.S. make a deal with Israel

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\(^73\) Talbot to Rusk, September 30, 1962, FRUS, 18:145-146.
\(^74\) Komer to Bundy, October 9, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL; and Brubeck to Bundy, October 22, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\(^75\) Series of Documents, September-November, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
\(^76\) Feldman to Kennedy, October 2, 1962, FRUS, 18:151.
that in exchange for not pressing such resolutions, the U.S. would quietly drop the
Johnson Plan and instead, urge that the PCC continue the negotiations.

Yet, the State Department and the American UN delegation continued to press for
movement. Rusk suggested tactics for further efforts that included supporting a new
initiative by the PCC, using quiet negotiations, avoiding UN resolutions that might
damage such talks, and a one-year extension for UNRWA. The essence of this strategy
would remain the basic approach toward the refugee issue throughout the rest of
Kennedy’s administration. The President and his advisors continued to believe that
solving the refugee issue would be the most important work they could achieve in Middle
East policy.

In late November, discussions between Israel and the U.S. began to get testy.
Talks with the Israeli Foreign Minister had not produced any movement on Israel’s stand
and Meir requested a meeting with Kennedy. Komer, always ready with his opinion,
suggested Kennedy refuse the meeting to show his unhappiness toward Israel. In the end,
however, Kennedy agreed to a meeting on December 27, 1962. Feldman, Talbot, Komer
were also present, as well as Israeli Ambassador Harman. American frustration with
Israel was high and Kennedy complained about the lack of Israeli cooperation with UN
personnel, violations of armistice terms for the demilitarized zones, limited access to the
Dimona Reactor site, and the failure of the refugee initiative.

Meir was just as strident in her criticism of the United States. She argued that the
HAWKS were a very small step in preserving Israeli security in the face of increasing

77 Rusk to Kennedy, November 11, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
78 Rusk to Barbour, November 21, 1962, FRUS, 18:237.
79 Memo: Komer to Bundy, November 23, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
Soviet weapons sales to Arab neighbors. She argued that any kind of repatriation of refugees into Israel presented significant security risks, as most Arabs continued to call for the destruction of Israel. Her arguments made an impression on Kennedy and while he did press for more cooperation, he volunteered a significant statement. Kennedy assured Meir that the U.S. had "a special relationship with Israel in the Middle East comparable only to its friendship and alliance with Britain..." He did insist that in order to have any Middle East policy at all, the U.S. must preserve some kind of a balanced approach to both sides. Both leaders promised to continue talking, and talking was all Kennedy was going to receive from Meir. After all, the U.S. had already given Israel what it wanted.

As the year 1963 approached, both State and Komer looked for strategy on how to deal with the refugee issue. Talbot wrote a long memo to Rusk on November 28 in which he carefully outlined the pros and cons of American actions. Although he indicated drawbacks to all sides, he argued that the U.S. had the least to lose by continuing to pressure Israel toward some kind of an agreement. Komer argued strongly that Kennedy not drop the Johnson Plan yet. Angry at Israel's rejection, he wrote:

"Your Administration has done more to satisfy Israeli security preoccupations than any of its predecessors. We have promised the Israelis Hawks, reassured them on the Jordan waters, given a higher level of economic aid (to permit extensive arms), and given various security assurances. In return, we have gotten nothing from our efforts..."

He went on to argue that to let the Johnson Plan die at this point could be a big mistake.

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80 Memorandum of Conversation, December 27, 1962, FRUS, 18:276-283.
81 Ibid., 280.
82 Talbot to Rusk, November 28, 1962, FRUS, 18:239-247.
83 Komer to Kennedy, December 5, 1962, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
Joseph Johnson resigned from his post as Special Representative on January 31, 1963.84 Before he left the negotiating arena, however, he met with the President and his top advisors to talk about the Arab refugees. While the overall tone was somewhat pessimistic, Johnson did list several basic principles that any future agreement must include. These were the free expression of refugee will, some repatriation along with significant resettlement, and the quiet "acquiescence" instead of open agreement between Israel and the Arabs. This latter point, Johnson insisted, would be the only way progress would be made, since both sides demanded prior agreement from the other. He pointed out that the Arabs were willing to accept acquiescence, and that some also agreed to the Israeli repatriation ratio of no more than one in ten, a significant accommodation on their part. Although only small progress had occurred, there was some hope. The American role would be critical, especially for communicating between the two sides, since, as Johnson put it, "we had more communication with the Chinese communists than the Arabs and the Israelis have between each other."85

Based on the continuing belief that progress on the refugee issue was the best chance for peace, and that some basis existed for talks, the U.S. reopened discussion with both Israel and Arabs in the spring of 1963.86 The plan was to use the United States as a negotiator between both sides and to talk bilaterally with all member states to determine their positions. Then, the U.S. could work toward some kind of an agreement that would avoid having the Israelis and Arab states negotiate directly with each other.87 It sounded complicated and artificial, but appearances were, as always, very important.

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84 Brubeck to Bundy, February 5, 1963, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
85 Memorandum of Conversation, February 6, 1963, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
86 Rusk to Macomber, February 27, 1963, FRUS, 18:367.
87 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, July 4, 1963, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
By April, the first round of bilateral talks had occurred in Jerusalem and all sides had committed to further discussion. The next round of conversations was to focus on such specific issues as, how many refugees Jordan thought it could absorb, the number Israel would accept, and so on. By the end of the summer, however, American negotiators were still waiting for specific statements from the Israelis or Arabs. Both sides avoided a commitment to any numbers, but both continued to talk.88 Scheduled discussion on the refugee issue was approaching in the UN General Assembly and all sides began their usual maneuvering.

While the Arab states were willing to remain quiet in the General Assembly on the subject of refugees if the others would, the U.S. heard rumors that Israel was planning to reintroduce its old, direct-negotiations resolution.89 This news made Kennedy very angry because part of the agreement with Israel to drop the Johnson Plan included their promise to not press such resolutions in the UN. Therefore, the United States planned to vote against any resolution by either side and to issue their own, calling for further negotiations based on paragraph 11 of Resolution 194 (calling for repatriation of refugees as part of any settlement).90 Komer and the State Department agreed that this would be the best way to handle the UN debate and prevent the refugee talks from derailing over unrealistic resolutions.91

Although in November 1963 the General Assembly adopted the U.S. resolution and rejected the Israeli and Arab resolutions (exactly what the US intended), the issue would not rest. Israel, upset that the U.S. had used Paragraph 11 as the basis for the

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88 Rusk to Macomber, April 13, 1963, FRUS, 18:465-468; and Sisco to Cleveland, September 19, 1963, FRUS, 18:326-327.
89 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, September 23, 1963, FRUS, 18:714-716.
90 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, November 16, 1963, FRUS, 18: 788-790.

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resolution, claimed Kennedy had lied. In a heated exchange between Komer and Mordecai Gazit, both sides accused the other of subterfuge. Komer argued that if the United States backed Israel in all cases as they wished, the Arabs would turn to the Soviets, damaging Israel's security in the long-term. Gazit charged that Kennedy was holding Israel "at arms-length" and not giving it the support it promised. Komer's reply was more of an outburst of frustration than anything else. He argued that the U.S. had given Israel nothing but support, missiles, assurances, guarantees, but in return had no idea what Israel was doing with its nuclear development and weapons procurement. To make matters worse, Komer charged that recently Israel had refused to tell the United States that it was buying missiles from France. "What kind of a relationship was this?" he asked.92

By the end of 1963, Israel was less and less willing to cooperate on the refugee issue. On December 3, the Knesset voted support for Meir's statement that Israel would not negotiate over the refugee issue based on Paragraph 11.93 Israel had no interest in any kind of negotiations that would lead to repatriation, especially in the absence of general peace. Ben-Gurion managed to manipulate the United States into selling it major weaponry for the first time and gave nothing in return. Kennedy was right back where he started on the refugee issue, with no real progress. This best hope for the beginnings of peace in Palestine, and a major prong of Kennedy's plan for the Middle East, had failed.

91 Komer to Bundy, November 19, 1963, NSF Box 148, JFKL.
92 Memorandum for the Record, November 21, 1963, FRUS, 18:797-801.
93 Footnote 1, FRUS, 18:384.
Although the refugee issue did not produce a victory for Kennedy in his Three-pronged Plan for the Middle East, he did manage to keep the non-neutral Arab regimes aligned with the U.S. throughout his term. This task would not always be easy, and many times Kennedy felt he was walking a tightrope trying to balance all the various issues at stake. He was convinced, however, that no matter what else happened, he must support and reward faithful allies, especially Iran. At the same time, he hoped to direct these allies toward reform and eventually, less dependence upon American aid. This was especially the case with Iran.

The White Revolution in Iran

Throughout the first year of Kennedy’s term, his policy-makers debated how best to preserve the royal regime while urging the Shah toward reform. The Shah meanwhile was busy trying to cajole the President into providing additional military aid.\(^1\) Kennedy invited him for an official state visit in the spring of 1962 and presented a five-year, military aid package (MAP). There were some disagreements, and the Shah asked for more, as usual. Komer wanted to keep strictly to the plan and urged Bundy to "tell Bill (William Bundy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense) and Phil (Talbot) that the President personally says 'hell no.'"\(^2\) In the end, however, Kennedy gave in on several issues and granted two frigates and monetary support for an additional 10 thousand troops. Rusk instructed the embassy to make sure the Shah realized that they would make

\(^1\) Holmes to Rusk, March 7, 1962, FRUS, 17:511; Battle to Bundy, March 8, 1962, FRUS, 17:516.
\(^2\) Komer to Bundy, Sept. 15, 1962, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
no more additions. Some policy-makers, especially those inside the State Department, began to relax and believe their New Frontier aims in Iran were on the road to fulfillment. 

Inside Iran, however, conditions were not going as Prime Minister Amini had planned. Amini was dedicated to reform as Kennedy hoped he was, but at every turn, the Shah frustrated his efforts. At the very beginning, Amini wanted to cleanse the cabinet of corrupt officials, but the Shah wanted to protect his friends. The Prime Minister resisted at first and often struggled with the Shah over budgetary issues. In one particular argument, Amini later recalled, he pleaded with the Shah to spend less on the military and more on agriculture and education. "Whom are we going to fight with?" he asked. "If you have the Soviets in mind, this is no match for that. She can wipe us out with a single blow." The Shah argued with Amini and told him it was his prerogative. "I must either rule or leave," he later quoted the Shah as saying. "Whenever you rule, you will leave," Amini responded.

He was also frustrated, because he believed that Iran not only did not need such a large military, but also because it could not even spend what it already had. People from the Plan Organization regularly witnessed the military rushing at the end of a fiscal year to spend leftover money to avoid reduced budgets the next year. Once, Farmanfarmaian told the Shah that the money for just one military aircraft could build a number of hospitals and clinics. The Shah laughed at this suggestion, arguing that no one really understood Iran's outside threats but him.

While Amini sought to de-centralize government and cleanse it of corruption, Pahlavi held onto control even tighter. If anything went wrong in the Iranian economy,

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3 Memorandum of Conversation (Shah, Holmes, et al), FRUS, 18: 100; and Rusk to Holmes, Sept. 18, 1962, FRUS, 18: 99.
5 Amini, Tape 4.
6 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 11.
the Shah would blame some subordinate and dismiss him. Amini later spoke of the atmosphere that pervaded the royal government:

The biggest problem was this centralization-centralized authority...and the inability to delegate authority. It all rests upon what I think is fundamental to democracy anywhere, and certainly in Iran. You've got to be able to make mistakes. Democracy is postulated on the fact that you're human beings...(but when) you cannot make mistakes-if you made a mistake, you lose your position-nobody's going to take any risks. So nobody would do anything.7

Not only did this fear produce inertia in government, but curing it of corruption also proved virtually impossible. For example, Amini tried to persuade the Shah to raise the pay of certain groups such as policeman. These men, underpaid to the point they could not support their families, took bribes for survival. Amini blamed, not the policemen, but the Shah. An Iranian general, Faholah Minbashian, also blamed government corruption on low pay for the army. He argued that the poverty of soldiers and other government officials made corruption necessary for survival.8

As Amini and his advisors sought to institute land reform, agricultural projects and an anti-corruption campaign, Kennedy continued to view Iran in terms of a military ally to contain communism. Even though the Kennedy administration talked about reforming Iran and other "Third World" countries, Kennedy's actions suggested otherwise. Farmanfarmaian, head of the Plan Organization during Amini's tenure, later recalled a trip he took to the US to plead for money. But all Rusk and others wanted to talk about was the National Front, whether or not it was growing stronger and posed a serious threat to the Shah. He did finally receive some money, but found the American preoccupation with the Shah's stability a hindrance to the reform the U.S. claimed to support.9

7 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 3; and Frye, Tape 2.
8 See Faholah Minbashian, in an interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, December 1, 1981, Cagne-Sur-Mer, France, Tape 1, Iranian Oral History Collection, Harvard University.
9 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 7.
As the year wore on, Amini became more frustrated as the Iranian economy slid into a deep recession. Land reform policies had cost the country and Amini's attempts to financially support reform were beginning to take its toll.\textsuperscript{10} The Shah continually refused to cut military expenditures and became suspicious and jealous of Amini's growing popularity.\textsuperscript{11} In frustration, Amini turned to the U.S. for financial support for his reform programs and beleaguered economy. Even the World Bank refused to support his reform with debt-extension loans and in frustration, Amini resigned, creating another round of panic and reassessments within the Kennedy administration. The U.S. watched in apprehension as the Shah took more control of the government and began talks with the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{12} It seemed to some that the Shah was jeopardizing the embryonic reform movement begun the previous year. Komer continued "beating State up regularly on Iran," as he put it, and urged the White House to re-evaluate policy.\textsuperscript{13}

No such examination occurred. Throughout the rest of 1962, policy-makers would relax on the Iranian issue, assuming that the Shah, by reasserting direct control in the wake of Amini's resignation, would continue the reform process and work toward fiscal stability, now that he was secure in his military assistance. Some policy-makers, however, continued to worry, including the ever-critical Komer. In October, he drafted a paper analyzing U.S. policy that said Iran was experiencing "just another lull before the storm." He worried that the State Department had not been pushing the Shah hard enough toward reform and complained that Holmes was too conservative and should be replaced. He argued that it was ridiculous to worry about associating the United States with the Shah's regime. Everyone already knew the Americans were "pulling the strings" in Iran,

\textsuperscript{10} Iran Task Force Report, FRUS, 17: 417; Komer to Bundy, June 1, 1962, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{11} Amini, Tape 3.
\textsuperscript{12} Miller, Tape 5; and National Intelligence Report, Sept. 7, 1962, FRUS, 18: 85; Holmes to Rusk, Sept. 13, 1962, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{13} Komer to Bundy, June 20, 1962, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
he asserted. It might as well pull them the right direction and take a stance in favor of serious reform to save Iran from revolution.14

Komer, it seemed, was talking into thin air. The State Department was satisfied that it had taken all the necessary steps to secure and encourage reform in Iran. At a Special Group meeting on November 5, 1962, Ambassador Holmes reported that he was satisfied with the Shah's land reform program, calling it "truly revolutionary."15 Angry at what he called a "snow job" by Holmes, Komer wrote Kennedy that he believed "the trend line is still toward (the) upset of yet another outworn monarchy" in Iran. He also asserted that the Shah had abandoned most of Amini's reforms, only land reform continued, that elections were rigged, and development had stagnated. "We're just in a hiatus period between Iran crises," he wrote.16 As usual, however, no one heeded Komer's alarms.

In early 1963, it seemed that the Shah at last understood what he must do to strengthen his political base, avoid unrest, and secure continued American support. The Shah announced his so-called "White Revolution," the major portion of which involved the continuation of land redistribution from wealthy landlords to landless peasants. Other elements included the on-going anti-corruption campaign, decentralization of government functions, some privatization of government-owned factories, and profit sharing plans for workers.

Redistribution of land in Iran was necessary for modernization and most people fully supported it (except for the wealthy landlords themselves). In his haste to prove himself a reformer, the Shah neglected to consider problems such as the start-up cost of independent farming or access to water for irrigation. Instead of concentrating on essentials such as seed development or storage houses, the Shah put most of his building

14 Komer to NSC Staff, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
15 Memo for the Record, Special Group Minutes, Iran, FRUS, 18: 201.
16 Komer to Kennedy, Nov. 5 and 13, 1962, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
efforts into large factories that did nothing for the little farmer. As had occurred in the American South after the Civil War, many peasants lost their land to creditors because they could not produce enough on their small plots to pay their debts. Soon, the people who needed economic liberation were worse off than before.

More immediately, some of the Shiite clergy, or Mullahs (theologians) who preached and taught Shia Islam, opposed land reform because large landowners had largely financed their seminaries. Highest-ranking Mullahs (Ayatollahs) preached against the "White Revolution," accusing the Shah of sacrificing the true, Islamic identity of Iran to Western ideas of progress. The Shah's enfranchisement of women also pitted some in the religious community against him. The very popular Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini saw this move as one more example of Western, cultural imperialism and the destruction of an authentic, Iranian identity. He and a core group of Shia theologians had recently developed the theory that Islam must become the basis for Iranian government in order to preserve cultural authenticity.

Economic reform was the focus of the Shah's "revolution," but what the middle class wanted was democratic reform. Even though mullahs would later criticize democracy as another example of cultural imperialism, the Iranian people sought it as the solution to their problems. Economic reform and industrialization was one thing, but what they really wanted was freedom of the press and fuller participation in government. Elections were rigged, and the Majlis was nothing more than a puppet of the Shah. Disappointed government officials, who had been educated in the West and believed in democratic reform, left in frustration or concentrated on making money.

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17 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 14.
18 Amini, Tape 5; and Miller, Tape 2.
20 Miller, Tape 1 and 2; and Ahmed Ghoreishi, in an interview recorded by Habib Ladjevardi, January 31, 1982, Moraga, California, Iranian Oral History Collections, Harvard University.
The State Department, however, and most of the Iran Task Force was very pleased with the "White Revolution." All on his own, the Shah was finally doing the very things Kennedy had pushed for. This was even better, observed U.S. diplomat William Miller, because the Shah had always been the preferred agent in Iran:

Most of the people in the embassy and in Washington believed that they should work through the Shah at every stage. That was the right way to do it...was legitimate, the easiest way. It was the one that had the least risks.²¹

The Kennedy administration never seriously considered reforming Iran without the Shah. They hoped his "White" revolution would prevent a communist one as attentions turned elsewhere in the Middle East.²²

In the spring of 1963, however, another crisis erupted that drove the Shah to assume increasingly direct control of the government. It also illustrated the failures of his "White Revolution." Various mullahs, led by Khomeini, began preaching protest sermons about the land reform and Iran's relationship to the West.²³ In the city of Qom, where Khomeini lived and preached, there was an Islamic seminary (the Faiziyih Theological School) to train the Shiite clergy. As the Shah received reports of Khomeini's sermons, accusing him of selling out the country to the West and rejecting the principles of Islam, he became frightened. On March 23, 1963, government military officials stormed the school and attacked the students. They killed one student and wounded several others.²⁴

In protest, Khomeini delivered an emotional sermon condemning the Shah on June 3, the eve of Ashura, the most important Shia holy day. Khomeini accused the Shah of being an enemy of Iran. The police arrested the Ayatollah the next day, along with

²¹ Miller, Tape 5.
²² Holmes to Rusk, Jan. 23, 1963, NSF, Box 116, JFKL; W. Bundy to David Bell, March 4, 1963. NSF, Box 297, JFKL; Alexis Johnson to Kennedy, March 7, 1963, NSF, Box 116, JFKL; Rusk to Kennedy, April 20, 1963, NSF, Box 340, JFKL.
²³ Holmes to Rusk, Jan. 23, 1963, NSF, Box 116, JFKL; Rusk to Holmes, Jan. 28, 1963, NSF, Box 340, JFKL.
several other mullahs, sparking riots throughout the country. In Tehran, the rioting became particularly destructive and went on for five days before the Shah ordered the army to shoot to kill. Later, the Shah admitted that the army had killed around 125 people, but others estimate the number to be in the thousands. It was not lost on the rioters that the tanks and bullets used against them were American-made.\(^{25}\)

To quell the unrest, the Shah placed several of the Ayatollahs under house arrest and exiled Khomeini in 1964. He then made plans to create a government ministry that would be in charge of overseeing all religious activities within Iran.\(^{26}\) The Shah came out of the June riots stronger and more dictatorial than ever – unwittingly laying the foundations for the 1979 Revolution.

Kennedy's opinion, nonetheless, continued to be positive. He and the State Department saw the 1963 uprising as an isolated event, caused by a few radicals. The embassy in Iran, however, saw much more meaning in it and warned Rusk about its possible significance. Miller, who had witnessed the uprising, later recalled the aftermath:

> The US embassy analyzed it, recognized it as important. But...when Khomeini was exiled, and the religious uprisings were crushed, and the situation became stabilized, people forgot about it...as though it had never happened. They just forgot.\(^{27}\)

By the fall of 1963, reports from the embassy in Tehran emphasized positive aspects of the "White Revolution" and ignored any problems. Bundy and Rusk continued to approach Iranian policy with cautious optimism, but Komer kept insisting on tougher policies.\(^{28}\) He argued that while giving money to the Shah was probably important, he urged tighter controls and oversight. "I can't help but feel that we're paying too much

\(^{25}\) Miller, Tape 2; Talbot to Rusk, June 6, 1963, FRUS, 18:570; Rockwell to Rusk, June 24, 1963, FRUS, 18: 601-603; and Abrahamian, Iran Between Two Revolutions, 460-61.

\(^{26}\) Footnote, FRUS, 18:602 and Special Group on Iran, June 28, 1963, FRUS, 18:607-609.

\(^{27}\) Miller, Tape 2.

\(^{28}\) Minutes of Special Group on Iran, October 17, 1963, FRUS, 18:741-2; Komer to Dave Bell, Nov. 5, 1963, NSF, Box 116, JFKL.
attention to the tail and not enough to the dog," he wrote. His voice was insistent, but not heard. After Kennedy's assassination, briefings on Iran given to President Lyndon Johnson came mostly from the optimistic Holmes, who asserted that unrest from opposition groups inside Iran "is no longer a threat." He gave a glowing report on improvements in the economy and praised the slow, but steady process of land reform.

American policy-makers believed that the system was working in Iran and even the resignation of Amini did not significantly alter this perception. If the Shah could reform Iran, then all the better, but what Amini was trying to do was involve the people in their own government. The Shah did not allow him to do this, and the United States allowed Amini to fall without any pressure. Miller later observed that this period had presented a "missed opportunity of rather sizable proportions." Farmanfarmaian agreed with this assessment. He argued that Amini had been the only one who could have really changed the Shah's thinking. After he resigned, the Shah stopped listening to his prime ministers.

Amini later criticized Kennedy's administration for failing to pressure the Shah to institute democratic reforms. "They are particularly guilty because they should have put the Shah on the right road before it was too late," he argued. If the United States had forced him to delegate power to his prime ministers while they still had leverage over him (in the 1950s and early 1960s), the Revolution of 1978 might have been averted. Instead, Kennedy was satisfied with the "White Revolution," allowing Shah Mohammad Riza Pahlavi to gather confidence and eventually, financial independence through increasing oil revenues in the late 1960s and early 1970s. By then, it was too late.

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29 Komer to Dave Bell, Nov. 5, 1963, NSF, Box 116. JFKL.
31 Miller, Tape 5.
32 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 8.
33 Amini, Tape 6.
Although he laid blame at the feet of U.S. policy-makers, Amini was also quick to point out that the primary responsibility stayed with the Shah. He argued that no one ever taught the Iranian people to be truly sovereign, which made them vulnerable in the end to Islamic radicals. Farmanfarmaian agreed and added that those who were educated learned how to be Western, not Persian. “I remember that I didn't even stop to ask the question,” he later stated. “Because after all, Iran had to become another United States or another European country, another England.” He conceded that since the ideas he and others brought to Iranian politics were completely alien, some kind of a reaction was inevitable.

Reassurance to Lebanon

Although Lebanon would never play a large role in Kennedy’s Middle East strategy, its acquiescence in his plans was important, especially because of its proximity to Israel. Conditions in Lebanon provided another perspective from which to view problems in other parts of the region. On most important subjects such as the Arab refugees or the Jordan River issue, Lebanon simply allowed the other Arab states take the lead and then supported those they agreed with most.

Lebanon itself was of strategic importance primarily because of its location. It shares borders with Syria and Israel and contains most of the headwaters for the Jordan River. It was also the terminus for TAPLINE, transporting oil from Saudi Arabia, and a pipeline from Iraq. By the time of Kennedy’s administration, Lebanon continued to be important because of the pipelines that crossed it and oil refineries at Sidon and Tripoli. Lebanon is a small country with very few resources, so it was dependent on outside help. It also required a delicate balancing act on the part of its politicians because of the

34 Farmanfarmaian, Tape 6.
35 For example, early documents from Lebanon in 1961 give Foreign Minister Takla’s views on how Kennedy’s letters to Arab heads-of-state were received, and what was going on at Arab League meetings, McClintock to Rusk, June 28, 1961, NSF Box 138a, JFKL, or Lebanese views of the breakup of the UAR, Wilson to Rusk, October 4, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
mixture of Sunni Muslims, Maronite Christians, and other groups. When Camille Chamoun became President of Lebanon in 1952, the Chamber of Deputies was recomposed of 13 Maronite Christians, 9 Sunnites, 8 Shiites, 5 Greek Orthodox, 3 Druzes, 3 Greek Catholics, 2 Armenian Orthodox, and 1 representative for the small group of Protestants, Jews, and Roman Catholics.\textsuperscript{36} When regional unrest inspired coups in its neighbors in 1958, the United States brought in troops to stabilize Chamoun’s regime.

Kennedy’s policy toward Lebanon consisted of maintaining the status quo, or perhaps reducing aid if possible.\textsuperscript{37} In December 1961, an interesting incident occurred that temporarily directed attention toward Lebanon. The State Department learned that the Soviet Ambassador to Lebanon was protesting the fact that Lebanon had a technical assistance agreement that involved West Germany, including Berlin. The Soviets insisted that Berlin was part of East Germany and could not be included in any such agreement. There was an exchange of words between the Soviets and Lebanon in both countries’ presses.\textsuperscript{38} The major issue for the U.S. was the discussion over Berlin. Lebanon became the sounding board for the two superpowers.

The Soviets were angry that Kennedy allowed Berlin to be included in the wording of such an inter-country agreement, as though the Americans were purporting to speak for East Berlin. The State Department retorted that the Soviets were the ones blocking access to East Berlin and that they were trying to use Lebanon to stir up trouble. After several rhetorical exchanges, the superpowers relaxed and Lebanon could rest easier.

Soon, however, another issue arose. France, along with a Lebanese businessman named George Karam, owned part of Lebanon’s major airline Air Liban. Karam decided

\textsuperscript{37} Meyer to Rusk, June 14, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{38} Ball to Beirut, Bonn, London, Moscow, and Paris, December 21, 1961, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
he wished to sell his shares in Air Liban and the USSR was interested in buying them.\textsuperscript{39} The Lebanese government then got the idea that the U.S. wished to purchase the shares to keep them out of Soviet hands. The Americans did not want to set such a precedent or directly to interfere in free international enterprise.\textsuperscript{40} If they did so, it could severely damage American standing with Arab nations as well as Africa and others already accusing the West of imperialism. Kennedy did quietly encourage the Lebanese government to discourage Karam from selling his shares to the Soviets and convince the French to assist if possible.\textsuperscript{41} He feared that the Soviets would use access to the Lebanon airline to make in-roads in the African countries to which the airline flew. Eventually, Kennedy’s efforts were successful.

More potentially threatening was a coup attempt in Lebanon on December 31, 1961. A Maronite (Christian) Captain Fuad Awad led the revolt and his men seized President Fuad Chehab and other officials. However, the army received warning and quickly regained control. In the wake of this attempt, Chehab sought greater reassurances of American support. Rumors abounded that Jordan had been involved in the attempt, or perhaps even the British. Kennedy hastened to reassure Lebanon that the U.S. supported its independence and would continue to supply aid. This reassurance appeared to relax the atmosphere.\textsuperscript{42}

The calm in Lebanon, however, was only on the surface. While Kennedy would not face significant problems with that country during his tenure, it was clear that much was unstable there. American Ambassador to Lebanon Armin Meyer wrote an insightful telegram in March 1962 that exposed possible problems for the future. He had visited with former King Camille Chamoun, whom he described as "vindictive and

\textsuperscript{39} Wilson to Rusk, December 29, 1961, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{40} Rusk to Beirut Embassy, January 4, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{41} Meyer to Rusk, January 5, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{42} Wilson to Rusk, December 31, 1961, NSF Box 138a, JFKL; and documents January-February 14, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.

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psychologically not well." Chamoun was angry that Chehab never asked him for advice and accused him of being "dominated by the nefarious influence of Nasser." Meyer used this example as an illustration of problems lingering from the unrest of 1958 and a forecast of trouble to come for that country. It was an early warning worth remembering, but there is little indication it made an impression in the State Department.

While relations between the United States and Lebanon were mostly good during the Kennedy administration, there were the usual discussions over amounts of American aid, and requests that Kennedy get involved in disputes with American-owned companies. One dispute took place with TAPLINE (Trans-Arabian Pipeline Company), the company that constructed the oil pipeline to pump oil from Saudi Arabia through Lebanon to the Mediterranean beginning in 1950. The United States insisted on staying out of the dispute, but urged both sides to negotiate peacefully and in good faith. Eventually, TAPLINE and the Lebanese government reached a compromise. The U.S. had never been terribly worried about the conflict, since it was actually cheaper to haul oil via tankers through the Suez Canal than through TAPLINE.

Later in the summer of 1962, the Soviets made another attempt at gaining access to Lebanon. They began requesting landing and passenger rights in Beirut and soon, East Germany and Poland followed with similar requests. Again, Kennedy kept a low profile, but did try to convince the Lebanese that granting such rights to the communist bloc would be damaging to them in the end. The Lebanese took American advice to heart and relations between the two continued to be cordial.

Not only did Kennedy seek to keep the Soviets out of Lebanon, but he wished to keep out France as well. He received word in early 1963 that the French were offering to sell Mirage III jets to their old friends and Kennedy quickly offered to sell them F-5As.

43 Meyer to Rusk, March 9, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
44 Ibid.
45 Meyer to Rusk, May 29, July 5, 14, and August 7, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
instead. This was an important gesture, designed not only to remain the primary weapons supplier in Lebanon, but also to show that the U.S. sold weapons to "good Arabs as well as Israelis." 46 As the State Department worked to counter the French offer, the Lebanese requested the planes for a "symbolic price" only or as an outright grant.47 Kennedy refused to do so because it would set a dangerous precedent.

For the most part, U.S.-Lebanese relations continued to be good and uneventful. The Lebanese reaction to another coup in Iraq in February 1963 was calm, as well as the subsequent upheaval in Syria. Its call for an Arab union with Egypt and Iraq, however, was another matter. Because Lebanon maintained a delicate balance between Christians and Moslems, any kind of union movement would threaten to disrupt this balance. Kennedy replied that the U.S. supported Lebanese independence, but wanted reciprocity. Lebanon was at that time allowing trade with Cuba in spite of the American announcement that it would no longer aid countries trading with Cuba. Lebanon assured the U.S. that it understood and would begin to rewrite its shipping laws accordingly.48

In fact, Lebanon had long had much at stake in its relationship with the U.S. and would continue to argue, like the Shah, for a special relationship between the two. The Lebanese Minister of Public Works, Pierre Gemayel, told Ambassador Meyer that:

Lebanon was neutral only in Arab quarrels. In all other respects, he and other Christians were on [the] West's side and saw no reason to attempt to hide this fact.49

Lebanon continued to remind Kennedy of its orientation throughout the tumultuous summer of 1963 and the U.S. gave reassurances whenever asked.

Toward the end of the year, some notes of concern about Lebanon's future came from the Embassy to Rusk. Lebanon requested military equipment and Meyer

46 Komer to Kennedy, February 14, 1963, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
47 Rusk to Meyer, February 5, 1962, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
48 Meyer to Rusk, March 16, 28, June 13 and June 18, 1963, NSF Box 138a, JFKL;
49 Meyer to Rusk, March 28, 1963, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
recommended the U.S. sell it at scrap metal prices.\textsuperscript{50} Meyer felt that communists were making political inroads in Lebanon. He presented no evidence of his concern, only that Christians in Lebanon were "flirting with communists because of [their] fear of Nasserism."\textsuperscript{51} Everyone wondered what would happen in Lebanon's upcoming presidential election in 1964. President Chehab had already made it clear he intended to step down and the last time there had been a transfer of power, in 1958, succession had been anything but smooth. Chamoun had rigged parliamentary elections in 1957 in order to support his re-appointment, a violation of Lebanese law.\textsuperscript{52} Telegrams out of Lebanon would continue to express concern through the rest of the year, but no direct action came from Washington. There was no consensus on the kind of policy needed to keep this ally faithful and at peace.

Pressure on Kuwait

Another small, but faithful ally of the United States was Kuwait. Although Kennedy considered Kuwait the realm of the British, he was interested in its security and urged its admittance to the United Nations. Throughout the process of diplomatic recognition, the major American concern was the response of Iraq. By the end of 1961, British forces had been joined by a mixed group of Arab troops, mostly Saudi, deployed to ensure Kuwait's independence.

The United States continued to leave most decisions regarding Kuwait up to the British, but remained in close consultation. The State Department continued to urge Kuwait to create development aid funds for Arab and African countries as a way to

\textsuperscript{50} Meyer to Rusk, May 10, 1963; and Meyer to Defense Department, September 25, 1963, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{51} Meyer to Rusk, July 8, 1963, NSF Box 138a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{52} Rashid Khalidi, "The Arab World and the West" in Louis and Owens, eds., A Revolutionary Year, 190-191.
spread goodwill toward itself. Iraq threatened to break diplomatic relations with countries recognizing Kuwaiti independence. It did break with Japan in March, much to the latter's surprise and dismay. Kuwait finally yielded to American advice, announced a loan to Sudan of more than $19 million dollars for railroad improvement, and contemplated similar aid to Jordan. By the end of 1965, Kuwait gave substantial loans to Sudan, Tunisia, Jordan and Egypt as part of their new, Kuwait Fund for Arab Economic Development (KFAED).

Aside from the problems caused by recognition, relations between the U.S. and Kuwait remained relatively calm. The only major wrinkle was a conflict between Kuwait and the various Western oil companies with concessions in the country. In March 1962, Kuwait tried to persuade British Petroleum and Gulf oil companies to give back land not currently under development. Not surprisingly, it wanted to hold onto much of this disputed territory and asked the U.S. and British governments to intervene. Both governments declined and instead, urged all sides to compromise. In the end, Kuwait and the oil companies agreed on a relinquishment of lands not already in development.

Finally, in the spring of 1963, Iraq began to soften toward Kuwait in the face of that nation’s acceptance by most of the world and imminent admission into the United Nations. Iraq began a series of talks toward establishing normal relations with Kuwait. At first, Iraq announced that it would recognize Kuwaiti independence, but privately, it asked Kuwait to abrogate its alliance with the British and pay a large bribe of 100 million Kuwaiti dinars. The Kuwaitis responded cleverly by ignoring the demand regarding the British agreement and offered Iraq a loan of 20 million dinars, half of it free of interest.

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53 Homer to Rusk, December 31, 1961; Macomber to Rusk, January 2, 1962, NSF Box 129, JFKL; Badeau to Rusk, January 3, 1962, NSF Box 129, JFKL.
54 Jeregan to Rusk, January 12, 17, and March 20, 1962; and Hart to Rusk, March 30, 1962, NSF Box 129, JFKL.
55 Russell A. Stone, OPEC and the Middle East. 162-165.
56 Rusk to Jeregan, March 31, 1962, NSF Box 129, JFKL; Ball to Jeregan, May 2, 1962; and Bruce (London) to Rusk, May 3, 1962, NSF Box 129, JFKL.
57 Bruce to Rusk, March 20, 1963; and Hart to Rusk, May 11, 1963, NSF Box 129, JFKL.
Finally, on October 5, 1963, Iraq officially recognized Kuwait's sovereignty, ending the crisis at least temporarily. In November, the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations with Kuwait, while the Americans watched and wondered whether the little sheikdom would remain closely tied to the West.\footnote{58}

Reforming Saudi Arabia and Jordan

As with Kuwait and Lebanon, relations with Saudi Arabia, another pillar of Kennedy's Middle East policy, remained generally strong – largely a consequence of King Saud's and Crown Prince Faisal's fear of pan-Arab nationalism. As did the Shah of Iran and the Emir of Kuwait, the royal Saudi family cooperated with Kennedy's policy for the most part, at least until the start of the Yemeni War. Until late 1962, Kennedy's plan to support and maintain the cooperation of royalist regimes functioned well.

Although most activity during 1961 with Saudi Arabia involved maintaining the status quo and working around the impending cancellation of the Dhahran Airfield Agreement, Kennedy was eager to begin development projects there. Some of the plans included working with ARAMCO to finance road construction, Peace Corps projects, and technical education proposals.\footnote{59} All this was part of the U.S. effort to help Arab countries become technologically self-sufficient so they would not need Soviet assistance. Kennedy also hoped to diffuse nationalist-neutralist unrest by Western-sponsored modernization.\footnote{60}

In exchange for this kind of support, the U.S. needed the Saudis to help preserve the independence of Kuwait. The Saudis provided the largest number of Arab troops sent in 1961 to counter Qasim's threatening rhetoric. This move allowed the U.S. to stay out of Kuwait and avoid Iraqi accusations of imperialism. Having the Saudis as loyal allies in

\footnote{58} Benjamin Read to Bundy, October 12, 1963; and Cottam to Rusk, November 8, 1963, NSF Box 129, JFKL.
\footnote{59} January 15, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
\footnote{60} Komer to Kennedy, February 12, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
Kuwait was very advantageous. They at times served as intermediaries in regional disputes where the U.S. had interests. During 1962, the Saudis served in this capacity in the Pakistan-Afghanistan dispute and kept Kennedy informed of progress.\(^61\)

While Saud was in the United States for medical treatment, Kennedy visited with the King early in 1962 and discussed many issues with him. They agreed on almost everything, except that the Saudis were skeptical of U.S. aid to Nasser. Kennedy did his best to explain his attempt to moderate Nasser, which Saud reluctantly acknowledged. The King requested economic assistance for his country in addition to the expected credit to purchase $16 million dollars worth of military equipment. Kennedy replied he would look into the subject and asked that the King stop refusing visas to Jewish-Americans. The King promised to look into that matter.\(^62\)

Although wanting to keep the loyal allies in the region happy, Kennedy had hoped to continue reducing the amount of aid given to royalist regimes in order to make his overall policy more balanced. The American response to Saud's request for economic aid was qualified. The State Department informed the Saudis that the U.S. was willing to help with development loans, technical assistance, and training, but no grant money – a reply that upset some of the King's cabinet members, but the King accepted the response. In fact, the Embassy in Jidda informed Rusk that they did not think the Saudis would really need much in American aid until perhaps 1964, and then specifically for development in agriculture and vocational training.\(^63\)

Later in the summer of 1962, the Saudis began talking with France about purchasing fighter jets and other military equipment. The United States wanted to be the sole military supplier to the Saudis, regarding it important to keeping some control over

\(^{61}\) Komer to Kennedy, January 24, 1962; and Komer to Bundy, February 8, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL.

\(^{62}\) Talbot to Middle East Embassies, February 16, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL.

\(^{63}\) Brubeck to Bundy, August 15, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL; Hart to Rusk, March 16, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL; Horner to Rusk, March 16, 1962, NSF Box 156, JFKL.
Saudi military and foreign policy. The U.S. quickly responded to an earlier Saudi request by granting them the ability to purchase about $13.5 million dollars worth of military equipment on credit.64

Overall, relations stood in good shape with Saudi Arabia. As was typical of allies in the region, the Saudis wanted more than the U.S. was willing to give, but still received significant aid in various forms and plenty of military equipment. The only major arguments centered on how much aid Kennedy would give the Saudis, where they would buy their weapons, the continued close American relationship with Israel, and why the U.S. felt it necessary to aid Nasser, whom the Saudis viewed as the major source of instability in the region. The U.S. would try to adjust to changing circumstances inside the Saudi government as the King became less and less important and handed most operations of government over to Crown Prince Faisal.65

As had been the case with Saudi Arabia, American relations with the other major ally, Jordan, continued to be generally good throughout 1962. Discussions with Hussein and his new Prime Minister, Wasfi Tal, mostly centered on the amount of U.S. aid to Jordan and Nasser. The former was never enough and the latter, always too much. Hussein continued to voice disappointment that Kennedy was focusing his policy toward Arab states upon Nasser, rather than on loyal allies such as himself or Faisal of Saudi Arabia. This source of antagonism would only increase after the eruption of the Yemeni crisis.

Meanwhile, the United States continued to support internal development in Jordan and urged the Prime Minister to work on ending corruption in government. Ambassador William Macomber also sought to persuade Jordan to purchase more American-made goods, instead of using U.S. aid to purchase cheaper materials from European countries.

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64 Rusk to Hart, August 9, and 14, 1962; and Hart to Rusk, September 22, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
65 Komer to Kaysen, October 1, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
Eventually, this issue would lead to stress between Great Britain and the U.S. as the former received what Kennedy considered an inordinate amount of Jordanian trade. In July 1962, Britain and the U.S. held talks on this issue and attempted to coordinate their aid and trade expectations with Jordan. Both countries wanted to reduce the amount of aid sent to Jordan, particularly for budgetary support. They disagreed substantially, on most other issues, namely, that of the "buy American" policy suggested by Kennedy's officials. Kennedy argued that the U.S. was spending the most money and receiving the least trade benefit. He further argued that Britain had more policy at stake in the region and should be willing to shoulder more of the burden.

In general, the American-Jordanian relationship was calm. From time to time, American officials would refer to the cabinet in Jordan as "New Frontiersmen" and continued to support and encourage more reform. Hussein would occasionally indicate concern over rumored cuts in American aid. Yet, overall, relations remained agreeable throughout most of the year. Some issues that caused discussion involved Jordanian visa restrictions to American Jews, and Jewish accusations of the desecration of a Jewish cemetery near the Mount of Olives – territory in the West Bank, under Jordanian control. In both cases, the United States acted as a cautious ally to bring about cooperation.

Toward late August, however, some indications of Jordan's fear of isolation surfaced in the form of a series of Jordanian-Saudi talks. Both countries feared internal subversion and unrest, spurred by Nasserite movements, and continued American aid to Nasser exacerbated the fear. Unrest in Yemen and Nasser's rumored connections to this

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66 Macomber to Rusk, February 1, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
67 David Newsom of US Embassy in London, to Rusk, July 23, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
68 Macomber to Rusk, February 1, 1962; and Memo of Conversation, March 7, 1962, both in NSF Box 125, JFKL.
69 Barbour to Rusk, June 2, 1962, Macomber to Rusk, June 2, 1962, Rusk to Macomber, June 2, 1962, And Macomber to Rusk, June 26, 1962, all in NSF Box 125, JFKL.
trouble on the Saudi border also stimulated the two countries to talk about military cooperation.70

On September 26, 1962, a coup in Yemen started a civil war that would draw the Saudis and Egyptians into the struggle. In the face of this trouble, Kennedy would have to decide which side to please and whether or not to recognize the new republican government in Yemen. It would not be an easy choice, because in order to please the "faithful allies" Saudi Arabia and Jordan, he would need to support the Yemeni royalist regime. In order to please his new, neutral friend Nasser, he would have to recognize the new republican government. The first and third prongs of Kennedy's Middle East Plan were now about to attack each other, a discouraging development, since the second prong of the plan, the refugee settlement, had fallen apart only weeks before.

70 Macomber to Rusk, August 31, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
At the beginning of Kennedy's administration, his policy toward the Middle East consisted primarily of (1) rapprochement with Nasser and Arab states and (2) a solution to the refugee issue. However, other issues intruded into discussions and threatened to derail Kennedy's hopes for the region. The most important of these issues was water.

The development of the Jordan River Project by Israel to irrigate more of the arid land, especially in the Negev Desert, was under construction when Kennedy took office. Observers estimated that Israel would begin drawing water for the Negev in late 1963. At that point, Arab retaliation was possible and expected by most analysts. The question was, how to keep this trouble from happening, and how much attention should the U.S. pay to water resource allocation.

The Hydrography

The Jordan River basin is part of the Great Rift Valley that runs through the Middle East and Africa. The basin covers approximately 18,300 square kilometers and contains mountain ranges in the north and along both sides of the river, and alluvial plains in the middle. The river itself begins at the foot of Mount Hermon in Lebanon and ends at the Dead Sea. The headwaters of the Jordan are formed from the convergence of three rivers: the Hasbani, the Banias, and the Dan. These three rivers meet approximately seven miles north of Lake Huleh, and then pass through the Sea of Galilee. South of
Galilee, the Yarmuk River joins the Jordan, flowing West and forming the boundary between Syria and Jordan. The rest of the Jordan’s river length serves as the boundary between Jordan and Israel and then between Jordan and the West Bank territory, that would be occupied by Israel in 1967.¹

There is very little rainfall in the Jordan Valley, so reliance on the river and its sources is imperative. Lebanon, Syria, Israel, and Jordan are all riparian states (borders contiguous to the Jordan River system) and therefore have legal rights to its waters. The catchment area for the headwaters of the Jordan is divided between Jordan, Lebanon, and Israel, while the Yarmuk catchment is completely within Syria. Most drinking water in the basin area comes from aquifers (groundwater tapped through wells) because of the high salinity of the Jordan.²

Of the riparian states, Israel and Jordan are the most dependant on the Jordan River. Syria has the most water resources consisting of springs, a good source of groundwater, and several rivers, of which the Euphrates and Yarmuk were most important. With such resources, Syria is the least dependant of the riparian states on the Jordan River. Lebanon receives more rainfall than the other riparian states and has its own river, the Litani. Since the land is mountainous, only about 25% of it is cultivable, thus requiring less water. Lebanon’s major impact on the Jordan River is its political control of the Jordan headwaters.

Israel is primarily dependant on the Jordan River system for almost one third of its water, supplemented by aquifers along the watershed in the central region and some rainfall in the north. The southern third of the country is desert, one third consists of

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¹ See Appendix I for a map of the Jordan River Basin.
coastal plain, and one third the Jordan River valley. Israel is not as dependent as Jordan is on irrigation and agriculture in order to feed its population. Jordan's geography makes most of its territory unsuitable for irrigation and agriculture. Three fourths of the country consists of desert plateau, so Jordan must rely on its stretch of Jordan River valley for all its agriculture and one half of all its water consumption. Its only other major source of water is the Yarmuk, on which it shares riparian rights with Syria.

Dividing the Waters

The beginning of the struggle over Jordan water occurred during the Mandate era while the Zionist movement was developing plans for settlement in Palestine. Chaim Weizmann believed that Palestine was capable of absorbing at least 65-70,000 people East of the Jordan and that the number could be increased by irrigation. A study of the region's water resources in the early 1940s by Walter Clay Lowdermilk, an American soil conservationist, further bolstered this conviction. Employed by the Jewish Agency for Palestine, Lowdermilk researched and published his findings in his 1944 book entitled *Palestine Land of Promise*. Patterned after the Tennessee Valley Authority, Lowdermilk recommended a development plan to irrigate both sides of the Jordan valley, to divert some of the upper river flow to the coastal plain and the Negev desert, and channeling Mediterranean water through canals for generating electricity.

In 1948, an American engineer named James Hays took the Lowdermilk concept and developed a detailed plan to execute it. This plan became the basis for Israeli water...
development ever after and immediately raised Arab concerns. First, such a plan would
supposedly enable large-scale Jewish immigration. Second, the plan called for moving
water resources out of the basin. This policy would only be acceptable under international
law, the Arabs argued, if all needs of people in the basin were completely satisfied. This
was very unlikely to be the case if Israeli completed its plans for a National Water Carrier
before Arab countries could develop similar projects and an allocation agreement with
Israel.

Just as Arab states had feared, Israel began unilateral development of Jordan
water by draining the marshes above Lake Huleh in 1951. Syria protested this action
since Israel was operating in the demilitarized zone. Jordan also began planning its own
water project with British assistance in 1951 and hoped to build a canal to nearby
agricultural land. An American group created a rival plan to build a dam at Maqarin on
the Yarmuk to provide water resources and hydroelectric power.

In 1953, Israel began working on its plans to divert water from the Galilee to the
Negev. Although Moshe Sharett, Prime Minister of Israel at the time, opposed working in
the demilitarized zone, Moshe Dayan (at the time, Minister of Agriculture) proceeded
without his knowledge. Dayan wanted to work in the demilitarized zone in order to create
a de facto claim to the land. Finally, after American and UN pressure, Israel stopped the
work in the demilitarized zone. It would later resume work on a National Water Carrier
from land well inside Israeli armistice lines.8

7 Ibid.
The Johnston Plan

In 1953, President Eisenhower sent water engineer Eric Johnston to Palestine to study and recommend an equitable division of the Jordan among Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. He hoped, among other things, to solve the Arab refugee problem by creating suitable agricultural land East and West of the Jordan. After two years of very hard work and negotiations, Johnston had succeeded in creating a division to which both Israeli and Arab parties tacitly agreed. He based the plan on an earlier proposal by the TVA that required the cooperation of all riparian states. UNRWA supported the plan because it would irrigate land that could support the settlement of 200,000 Arab refugees. It apportioned 60 percent of the Jordan water to Arab riparian states and 40 percent to Israel. More specifically, Jordan would receive 480 million cubic meters (mcms) per year, Syria 132 mcms, Lebanon 35 mcms, and Israel approximately 466 mcms. Although for some time Arab states argued with Johnston that Israel must not carry water outside the river basin, they eventually agreed Israel could do so after basin needs were met and Israel did not exceed its allotment. Likewise, Israel finally agreed to abandon plans to divert the Litani River in Lebanon into northern Israel.

Along with percentage apportionment, the Johnston Plan, or "Unified Plan," envisaged a dam on the upper Hasbani River for storage, a canal from the Jordan headwaters to irrigate the Western side of the Jordan valley, and diversion of water from the Yarmuk into the Sea of Galilee for storage. It also called for the construction of

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9 Paper from Near Eastern Affairs, State Department, February 6, 1961, FRUS, 17:15.
10 Allen, Water, Peace and the Middle East, 178-79.
12 Stevens, Jordan River Partition, 15.
canals on both sides of the Jordan River valley as far south as the Dead Sea, and the
collection of hydroelectric plants.\textsuperscript{13}

Although he did obtain tacit agreement from all sides, Johnston finally gave up
the battle to obtain signatures to the plan in 1955. The Arab League refused to endorse
Johnston’s plan for political reasons since to do so would mean recognition of the state of
Israel, not a politically feasible position. Another problem, from the Arab League’s point-
of-view, was that any irrigation of the Negev Desert would theoretically make large
amounts of Jewish immigration possible and might lead directly to territorial expansion.\textsuperscript{14}
Both sides, however, did unofficially abide by the Johnston Plan allocation amounts until
1967, although Arab states argued that Israel was preparing to go beyond the terms by
developing projects on land allocated to the Palestine Arabs by the UN.\textsuperscript{15}

Maintaining the non-binding Johnston agreement had been American policy ever
since 1955. To facilitate adherence, the U.S. gave $6 million dollars to Jordan’s East
Ghor irrigation project (begun in 1958) and $30 million to Israel’s National Water
Conduit (begun in 1959). This policy kept the situation peaceful because most water for
Israel was staying in the Jordan River Valley region and water used by Jordan was
coming mostly from the Yarmuk River, completely within Jordanian territory.\textsuperscript{16}
However, the situation would change in late 1963 or early 1964 when Israel would likely
begin pumping water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev Desert.\textsuperscript{17} Israeli plans to
eventually irrigate the Negev meant it would far surpass its water allocations. Heavy well

\textsuperscript{13} Lowi, \textit{Water and Power}, 207-208.
\textsuperscript{14} Paper from Near Eastern Affairs, State Department, February 6, 1961, FRUS, 17:15. 16.
\textsuperscript{15} Stevens, \textit{Jordan River Partition}, 34.
357-371.
\textsuperscript{17} Paper from Near Eastern Affairs, State Department, February 6, 1961, FRUS, 17:17.
usage on the lower plains of Palestine put further pressure on the water issue as water
tables in the West Bank dropped. Israel was taking water away from Arab refugees even
before the National Water Carrier was operational.

From Ben-Gurion’s point-of-view, the security and future success of Israel
depended on settling the Negev. The region was vital because it allowed the Jewish
population and the amount of land under cultivation to expand. Settling this region would
also create a larger buffer zone between Egypt and Israel and make maintaining control
of Sharm El-Sheik easier to accomplish. Ben-Gurion believed that Israeli expansion was
a manifest destiny for the Jewish state.\textsuperscript{18} The irony of this plan, however, was that
engineers and scientists thought that diverting water to the Negev was a very wasteful
plan. Evaporation through the desert pipeline would lose far too much water to make
such a plan truly feasible. The further irony was that pumping and drought increased the
salinity of Galilee, making the water less and less suitable for agriculture by 1963.\textsuperscript{19}

Arab states had been discussing the Jordan water issue in Arab League meetings
for several years and this subject would continue to dominate throughout Kennedy’s
administration. Worries about diversion of the Jordan, however, did not become the
major topic of conversation between Arab states and Kennedy. Although American
policy-makers understood the importance of the issue, the Arab League itself failed to
produce any specific plans or approaches until the end of Kennedy’s administration.\textsuperscript{20}

\begin{footnotes}
\item Stevens, \textit{Jordan River Partition}, 7-9.
\item Moshe Shemesh, “Syria’s Struggle over Water with Israel, 1959-1967,” in Ma’oz, Moshe,
Joseph Ginat and Onn Winckler, eds., \textit{Modern Syria: From Ottoman Rule to Pivotal Role in the Middle
\end{footnotes}
Kennedy did, however, expect to continue using the Johnston Plan and convince all sides to adhere to its terms. In a meeting between U.S. and British officials at the beginning of his administration, both sides addressed their views on Jordan water. Kennedy’s team asked the British whether they thought it worthwhile pursuing negotiations based on the Johnston Plan. The British replied that they did not think so, that “the Johnston Plan was a dead letter.” The State Department, however, disagreed with them, arguing that while “Israeli structures have a maximum capacity higher than that envisaged in the Johnston Plan...the Israelis say they are willing to abide by the terms of the plan.”

Kennedy intended to take Ben-Gurion at his word, or at least test it. The State Department told the President at the beginning of his administration that some degree of hope remained in the Johnston Plan. Since 1958, the NSC had been quietly observing all Jordan riparians and encouraging each to abide by the plan. All sides remained within their allocations and Kennedy could use the plan to pursue the subject of peace for the region.

One particular aspect of the issue involved renewing plans to build dams inside Jordan to store water from the Yarmuk River. Eric Johnston reported to Kennedy that according to his estimates, Israel would be capable of diverting 60 percent of the water from the region by 1963, significantly more than the 40 percent designated by his plan. If Israel were to take this larger percentage, he argued, this would keep Jordan dependent on "extensive foreign assistance." To prevent this, the U.S. needed to help Jordan build a

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22 Memorandum of Conversation, August 26, 1961, FRUS, 17:231.

large dam (the Maqarin Dam) on the Yarmuk as soon as possible. Johnston had already received a good response from King Hussein on such a plan.

The State Department, while agreeing with the dam project, did not want the U.S. directly involved in it. Rusk feared that if the U.S. associated itself too closely with the Johnston Plan, it would make the Arabs angry, since the Arab League had officially rejected the plan. If the U.S. backed it openly, the Arabs would accuse Kennedy of being pro-Israel. Balance was key if the other initiative, Joseph Johnson's Refugee Plan, was to have any chance at all. Instead, Kennedy planned to help Jordan obtain assistance from the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). Johnston agreed with this plan, as long as someone built the dam. The most important aspect of any kind of working water plan, he argued, should include some kind of international control system.24

While the subject did not come up again for some time, Kennedy must have authorized quiet work on the topic because he received a CIA report on Jordan Waters in May of 1962. In that report, officials concluded that if Israel proceeded according to plan, it would be pumping approximately 470 mcms per year of water from the Sea of Galilee to the Negev region by 1970. It would begin in 1963 by pumping 160 mcms per year. The CIA also reported that Jordan was beginning a five-stage project to irrigate approximately 119,000 acres with water from the Yarmuk. However, the project probably would not be complete until 1979. This condition made it much more likely that Jordan and Syria might take retaliatory action on Israel if their own systems were not ready

24 Johnston to Ball, August 26, 1961, FRUS, 17:233.
when Israel began her heavy diversion of Jordan water. The CIA recommended that the
U.S. assist Jordan in its development of the Yarmuk River as soon as possible.25

In the meantime, the U.S. sought to keep the Arabs calm as they began to hear
rumors that Israel was ready to divert water to the Negev. In early 1962, Syria
complained to the U.S. that it had heard Israel was ready to divert water from the Sea of
Galilee within weeks. State Department officials assured Syria that this rumor was
unfounded and then urged Israel to announce that it intended to abide by the Johnston
Plan.26 The main American objective was to keep the discussion out of the UN to avoid
posturing by all sides. However, Syrian officials continued to worry, and argued that
Israel was working on its diversion project in violation of a 1953 UN Security Council
resolution for Israel to “cease work” around the Sea of Galilee.27

It was becoming clear that a major part of the problem, along with Israeli claims
to demilitarized zones, stemmed from the fact that Israel had progressed much faster than
Arab countries in developing their water systems.28 As a result, the U.S. planned to give
Jordan more money and help speed up its dam construction. This would be the best way
to keep the Johnston Plan from being openly debated and therefore, quietly adhered to.
The real problem in Arab minds, however, was that Israeli diversion of Jordan waters to
the Negev desert likely meant a dramatic increase in Israeli immigration. According to
the Syrian Foreign Minister, this development only increased the number of the “enemy.”
American Ambassador to Syria Ridgway Knight expected continued Syrian resistance to

26 Grant to McGhee, February 24, 1962, FRUS, 17:490-492.
27 Knight to Rusk, February 22, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
28 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, March 10, 1962, FRUS, 17:521-522.
any further water diversion projects by the Israelis. Syria considered Israel’s water project to be “no less serious than [the] very establishment [of] Israel [in] 1948.”

The War Over the Sea

Then in March of 1962, a series of clashes occurred between Syria and Israel on the Sea of Galilee. Tel Aviv claimed that Syria had fired on an Israeli fisherman and police patrol boats. Supposedly in response, Israel launched a raid within the Demilitarized Zone of Galilee. There had been similar such raids in the past, the latest in 1956. Accusations flew as to who had actually started the firing and both sides tried to justify their positions. Syria made it clear that it tied access to the Sea of Galilee to the Jordan River project as a whole. Israeli Ambassador Harman told Talbot that Israeli vulnerability on Galilee was a result of Syrian occupation of the Golan Heights. Israeli reaction was reasonable under these circumstances.

In reality, Israel purposefully provoked most of the clashes over Galilee. Moshe Dayan later admitted this policy:

In my opinion, more than 80 percent [of the time] ...we would send a tractor to plow someplace where it wasn’t possible to do anything, in the demilitarized area, and knew in advance that the Syrians would start to shoot. If they didn’t shoot, we would tell the tractor to advance farther, until in the end the Syrians would get annoyed and shoot. And then we would use artillery and later the air force also, and that’s how it was.

Although Israel pretended to the United States that Syria was to blame for the clashes, it is clear that Israeli policy was to create situations that would allow them to fire on the

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29 Knight to Rusk, February 22, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
30 Battle to Bundy, April 18, 1962, FRUS, 17:629-633.
31 Rusk to Embassies, March 20, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
Syrians. However, Kennedy and his advisors tried to appease both sides and usually took Israel at its word.

Serious discussions with both sides of the conflict continued, as the U.S. tried to keep the situation calm. Ambassador Barbour criticized Israel's handling of the situation, and Meir angrily replied that Israel had every right to defend its sovereignty. Israel did agree to attempt de-escalation by withdrawing police boats at least temporarily.33 Meanwhile, Syrian Secretary General Ustuwani informed Knight of the role the Soviets might play in the crisis. He made it very clear that Syria wished to maintain a truly neutral stance in the super-power struggle, but it could not ignore the important support the Soviets had given to Syria in 1956. He argued that the Soviet Union alone supported Arab condemnation of the Israeli water project and he expected the USSR to take Syria's side in the latest clashes on Galilee.34 This discussion gave the U.S. an entirely different perspective to consider.

It was important that the U.S. avoid any kind of overt support for Israel at the expense of the Arabs. Syria had brought its complaints over the Israeli "retaliations" to the Security Council of the UN and Israel had filed a counter-complaint. Now Kennedy maneuvered to please both sides, a nearly impossible task. If the U.S. were to allow the Soviets to support Syrian actions and a resolution of condemnation of Israel, anything it might say after that would seem diluted or even pro-Israel. In order to circumvent this possibility, the American delegation planned to speak before the Soviets and call for

33 Barbour to Rusk, March 21, 1962; and Gavin to Rusk, March 27, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
34 Knight to Rusk, March 24, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
peace, while gently condemning Israel's resort to a policy of retaliation (in reality, a policy of aggression).\textsuperscript{35}

Planning proceeded on the kind of resolution the U.S. would put before the Security Council. The first draft recognized that both sides in the clashes had been at fault, but specifically condemned Israel's "retaliation" as a violation of the cease-fire provisions of General Armistice Agreement of July 15, 1949. The rest of the draft called on both sides to cease hostilities and use the UNTSO to solve any further disagreements.\textsuperscript{36} Israel immediately protested the wording of the proposed resolution. The Israelis argued that their actions had been in self-defense, that any resolution should blame Syria for creating the crisis, or at least give equal treatment to both sides. The French were also upset at the condemnation of Israel without equally harsh words for Syria. Therefore, the U.S. delegation wrote a weaker version of the resolution and circulated it. The draft replaced the word "condemn" with "deplores" the actions of both Syria and Israel. Rusk urged the American delegation to agree upon whatever version it wished "within the range between the stronger version and milder version."\textsuperscript{37}

Of course, the new version was far too weak to please the Syrians and still too strong in Israel's opinion. As days passed, more information from Council General Von Horn, who had investigated the incidents persuaded the U.S. to strengthen parts of the new version in favor of Syria. Co-sponsored by the U.K., the resolution passed in the

\textsuperscript{35} Plimpton to Rusk, March 27 and 28, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{36} Draft Resolution, Rusk to Kennedy, March 28, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{37} Rusk to USUN in New York, March 31, 1962; Yost (USUN) to Rusk, April 4, 1962; Draft Resolution, L.D. Battle to Bundy and Arthur Schlesinger and Rusk to USUN, April 4, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JKFL.
Security Council on April 9, 1962 in a vote of 10-0 with France abstaining. When it was all over, all the U.S. had managed to do was to keep the Soviets from using their veto to gain influence among the Arabs. The resolution pleased neither the Syrians nor the Israelis and did not solve any long-term issues.

Later, Ludlow and Talbot, assistant secretaries for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs, analyzed the episode. Kennedy informed the State Department that he was receiving heavy pressure from Israel over the resolution. The President demanded answers from his UN delegation and State Department. As Ludlow described it, the problem developed when the U.S. tried to please everyone, leading the Israelis to believe that all things were negotiable. In their view, the so-called "milder version" of the resolution was worse than the original because the U.S. made so many adjustments to please the Syrians, making it completely one-sided. This was proof, in Ludlow's mind, that if the U.S. was to retain credibility and the ability to operate real policy, it must frame its resolutions in isolation from the opinions of the sides involved. In spite of Syria's disappointment in the UN resolution, Arab response to it was generally quiet and at times, even positive. An editorial in Al-Wahdah, a state-sponsored, Syrian newspaper, praised Kennedy for his courage in rebuking Israel's actions on the Sea of Galilee. In this article entitled, "We Have Not Lost Hope, John Kennedy," the author spoke of American wisdom in the recent resolution. Even though the statement had not been all Syria had wanted, the author argued that "John Kennedy is trying as much as possible to create

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38 Yost to Rusk, April 6, 1962, NSF box 161a, JFKL; Barbour to Rusk, April 6, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL; and Battle to Bundy, April 18, 1962, FRUS, 17:629-633.
39 Ludlow to Talbot, April 11, 1962, FRUS, 17:586-589.
basic changes in... policy."\textsuperscript{40} Finding more positives than negatives for Syria in the resolution, the editorial praised Kennedy for being "more realistic."

Tensions on the Sea of Galilee continued. Von Horn reported just after the UN resolution had passed that the Israelis were testing 75-millimeter guns on their police boats on Galilee. The Israelis continued to insist on their sovereignty over the sea and requested the U.S. support their claim to prevent future problems from Syria. Reports from embassies in the field, however, continued to view such assurances as damaging to U.S. policies. The UNTSO was also upset because Israel refused to allow them to use patrol boats on the Sea of Galilee to avoid admitting joint sovereignty of the water.\textsuperscript{41}

In fact, by May of 1962, the U.S. was willing to recognize Israeli jurisdiction over the Sea of Galilee in exchange for an assurance that it would abide by the Johnston Plan. If Israel announced this position publicly, it would significantly weaken Arab protests. It would also mean that the U.S. would be in better standing at home with American Jews who wanted American support for Israel's right to Jordan water. One particular group, the United States Friends of Israel, was lobbying Washington on this issue.\textsuperscript{42}

As Kennedy wondered what the U.S. should do to avert a military clash over water of the Jordan river, he asked for an analysis from the Near East desk of the State Department. Talbot sent back an extensive report that recommended a number of actions. First, he argued that the U.S. did need to get involved quickly in order to keep Israel in line with the Johnston Plan. If Kennedy did not act now, Israel would take whatever

\textsuperscript{40} Translation of Article from \textit{Al-Wahdah}, Syrian Newspaper, April 11, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{41} Stevenson to Rusk, April 10, 1962; Knight to Rusk, April 12, 1962; and Battle to Bundy, April 18, 1962, FRUS, 17:629-633.
\textsuperscript{42} Grant to Ball, May 1, 1962, FRUS, 17: 651-654; Battle to Bundy, April 26, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
water it wanted. He recommended that the President give Israel assurance in writing that
the United States supported an equitable division of Jordan waters and quietly let Arab
states know that Israel was complying with the Johnston Plan. Lastly, he advised that
Ambassador Badeau remind Nasser that he had promised to keep the issue of Israel “in
the deep freeze.” All this, Talbot hoped, would avoid any eruption of hostilities over
the Jordan River.

In June and July of 1962, Kennedy sent Wayne Criddle, a highly respected
hydrologist who had worked with Johnston, to report on progress at the Jordan River.
Criddle reported that Israel still abided by the Johnston Plan and would begin
withdrawing water from the Sea of Galilee in early 1964. In a position to inform Jordan
of scheduled releases of water from Galilee, Israel then could make water available to
Jordan as the agreement had stipulated. The State Department recommended that Criddle
quietly report his findings to Jordanian technicians to see what their response would be. The U.S. also recommended that Israel provide public assurances to Arab countries of its
intentions and willingness to allow international observation of Jordan River usage if
Jordan would do the same. The response from Israel on the last point was not
enthusiastic, but the U.S. continued to insist on international observation.

At the end of 1963, the United States produced a more specific plan for use of
water from the Jordan. The State Department renewed the plan for the construction of a
dam on the upper Yarmuk River on the border of Jordan and Syria and another on the
Hasbani River to provide water for Lebanon. The proposal stipulated the amount of water
allocated to Jordan from the Sea of Galilee and how much water from the Jordan River

44 Read to Bundy, November 5, 1963, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
45 Memorandum of Conversation, October 10, 1963, FRUS, 18: 730-735.
each country, including Israel, was allowed to use. It also called for an “impartial body of
water engineers” to monitor the situation. Rusk argued that this plan was essentially the
Johnston Plan that all sides had agreed to before the Arab League voted against it in
1955. There were no arguments from the Arabs.

As with the refugee plan, Israel began to disrupt negotiations by arguing that the
proposal was not what Johnston had shared with them in 1955. The U.S. replied that what
Israel claimed to be the document they had accepted was no more than an Israeli
statement to Johnston that the latter had not accepted. Israel agreed to continue talks on
Jordan water, but these would occur under new American leadership. Like the refugee
plan, Kennedy tried to walk the tightrope between Arab and Israeli issues and please both
sides. In neither case did the U.S. achieve anything specific in terms of agreements or
solutions, but at least in the case of Jordan water, there would be no more disruptions
under Kennedy’s watch.

At the Arab League Summit in Cairo in 1964 (as Israel prepared to divert water to
the Negev), the Arab states created a plan to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River to
Syria and Jordan, thus depriving Israel of its share of Jordan water. Its recorded decision
got as follows:

The establishment of Israel is the basic threat that the Arab nation in its entirety
has agreed to forestall. And since the existence of Israel is a danger that threatens
the Arab nation, the diversion of the Jordan waters by it multiplies the dangers
to Arab existence... If the necessary results are not achieved, collective Arab
military preparations when they are completed, will constitute the ultimate
practical means for the final liquidation of Israel.

46 Department of State to Certain Posts, November 7, 1963, FRUS, 18:770-773.
47 Rusk to Embassy in Israel, December 9, 1963, FRUS, 18:835.
The statement goes on to outline plans to divert the headwaters, as well as establishing the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO). While not the only cause, water became a catalyst for the most official statement of Arab aims to destroy Israel. By trying to avoid the water issue, Kennedy only postponed inevitable conflict.
CHAPTER 8

THE TIGHTROPE BREAKS

Although some issues were causing strain in Kennedy's plan for the Middle East, the relationship with Egypt seemed to be progressing as planned. Kennedy would have liked more cooperation with the refugee plan, but major problems with the Johnson Plan had more to do with Israel and Jordan than Egypt. For the most part, Nasser continued a cooperative and friendly stance toward the U.S. and Kennedy reciprocated by continuing to funnel aid to him. The hope was that American financial assistance would keep Nasser from seeking Soviet help, and would persuade him to focus on domestic reforms.

The High Point of Rapprochement

In early 1962, Kennedy's administration considered an Egyptian request for a sale of cotton under the PL-480 agreement. Leaf worm had devastated the season's crop, so Nasser asked the U.S. for 350,000 bales to make up for the shortage. Approximately 35% of the crop was gone and resulting monetary losses would reach beyond $100 million. The problem was opposition in the American press to such a sale to Egypt. For example, a Time magazine article alleged that Nasser would sell the American cotton to the Soviets in exchange for jet aircraft.1 He was already selling between 15-17 percent of the Egyptian cotton crop to the People's Republic of China.2

This issue reopened a discussion in the State Department and NSC about the purpose and direction of American policy toward Egypt. In spite of a year of rapprochement, the Nasser relationship remained problematic. Rusk argued that conflict with Nasser over privatization of industry and his relationship with the Soviets should not

1 Battle to Bundy, January 2, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
stand in the way of giving aid to Egypt. Talk of a multi-year package for Nasser had been going on for almost a year with varying conclusions. While the State Department generally supported such a plan, William Gaud, the Near East coordinator for the Agency for International Development (AID) opposed it. He argued that giving long-term aid would remove the one bargaining tool the U.S. had to influence Egyptian policy.

Although there was much concern about the impact of such aid, Kennedy wrote Nasser mid January, announcing that the PL-480 multi-year aid package had been approved. Rusk suggested Kennedy send Dr. Edward Mason, an economist at Harvard, to Egypt with a team to help Nasser with economic planning. He also resurrected the issue of a visit by Nasser to the U.S. in April. While there were factors that discouraged such a visit -- the ongoing trials of suspected French spies in Egypt and, of course, expected opposition from Israel -- Rusk argued that the benefits would outweigh the risks. He wanted to take advantage of Nasser's recent moderate stance toward the Soviets and the good publicity generated by Jacqueline Kennedy's opening of the Tutankhaman exhibit at the National Gallery in Washington, D.C. In March, Ambassador Kamel informed Mason and other U.S. officials in the State Department that Nasser was eager for American aid and that there was "a genuine U.A.R. desire to shift from primary dependence upon the Soviet Bloc to primary dependence upon the West for economic assistance." This was, of course, what Kennedy hoped a multi-year aid package would accomplish.

To insure the desired results, Kennedy sent Ambassador-at-large Chester Bowles to visit Nasser and impress upon him American goals for Egypt. In his conversations with Nasser, Bowles emphasized that the U.S. "had no desire to control the area" and that Kennedy wanted the "development of independent countries capable of making their own

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3 Rusk: Background Memorandum, January 11, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
4 William Gaud, Interview by Joseph E. O'Conner, February 16, 1966, transcript, pp. 7-8, Oral History Interview, JFKL.
5 Kennedy to Nasser, Memorandum via U.S. Embassy in Cairo, January 11, 1962; and Rusk to Kennedy, January 11, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
6 Memo of Conversation: Edward Mason and Mostafa Kamel, March 1, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
free choices within the framework of their own cultures." Nasser assured Bowles that his aims were essentially the same and that any negative statements he made toward other Arab leaders was only in response to their attacks upon him. He also stated that he believed "communism as a political and economic system is unworkable in Africa or the Middle East." 

After a two-week trip to Egypt, Mason reported to Rusk that conditions for future economic growth in Egypt were favorable and suggested the flow of U.S. aid begin as soon as possible. He also determined that Egypt already had enough technical expertise and would not need additional American personnel to allocate money and run programs. Mason’s report presented an optimistic view of Egypt that served to encourage Kennedy to spend money there. Nasser seemed open to suggestions for agricultural reform and population control as well as industrial management. Mason also discussed the possibility of sponsoring a "Western desert water project" to reclaim deep, underground water resources that might irrigate as much as 500,000 acres. The project was already underway, and Mason urged that the U.S. associate itself with it, especially as a public relations counter to Soviet sponsorship of the Aswan Dam.

In April 1962, former U.S. Congressman George McGovern, now director of Kennedy's Food for Peace Program, visited Egypt on a fact-finding mission. He reported to Bundy that Egypt needed an additional 200,000 tons of wheat as well as large amounts of cotton immediately. The U.S. had denied earlier requests from Egypt for cotton because of fear they would sell it to purchase weapons from the Soviets. While products like cotton seemed harmless enough, the United States realized that Egypt did not need cotton for domestic use, only to raise revenue for weapons they could not purchase from

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7 Rusk to Kennedy, March 8, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
8 Ibid.
9 Badeau to Rusk, March 18, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
10 Badeau to Rusk, March 8, 1962; and Memo of Conversation, Mason and Geoffrey Wilson, Director of Department of Operations for South Asia-IBRD to Rusk, March 22, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
11 McGovern to Bundy, April 6, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.

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the United States. McGovern, however, insisted that Egypt would promise to not sell any of the cotton to the Soviets or any country. McGovern argued that such an extension of good will would do more than anything else to further good U.A.R.-U.S. relations.

The NSC, however, did not agree with McGovern's assessment. NSC staff member Harold Saunders argued that the domestic reaction would be very negative to such a sale. He doubted that Egypt could promise not to sell American cotton to the Soviet Bloc.12 In the end, Kennedy decided not to sell cotton to Egypt. Nevertheless, Fowler Hamilton, Administrator for AID, reported in late April that total amounts of PL-480 sales to Egypt for 1962 would reach $180 million. This figure showed a steady increase of U.S. aid to Nasser from the $81.4 million in 1960 and $102.8 million in 1961.13

Evidence of an improving Egyptian-American relationship did not pass notice in the Jewish-American community. For obvious reasons, it was concerned that continuing rapprochement with Nasser would damage Israel's chances at developing a close security alliance with the United States. On behalf of the Kennedy Administration, Bowles addressed the American Jewish Congress in New York on April 12, 1962. Bowles argued that the U.S. was gradually recognizing that what the Middle East needed was economic and political stability, not "a maximum military security program."14 The United States offered financial aid to Nasser and other leaders in order to encourage an atmosphere of live and let live," an approach that in the end would benefit Israel as much as Egypt.

Bowles later forwarded a copy of the speech to Bundy along with a suggestion to invite Nasser to the U.S. as soon as possible. Komer, Feldman, and Bundy reviewed the request and concluded that now was not the time. The United States had given a lot to Nasser and it should delay the honor of a personal visit until Nasser gave something in

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12 Bundy to McGovern, April 12, 1962, Saunders to Komer, April 11, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
13 Hamilton to Kennedy, April 17, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
14 Bowles to the American Jewish Congress, New York, April 12, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
return. Nasser received no presidential invitation, but other requests for aid kept rolling in. For example, Badeau wrote in late May 1962 that Egypt could use extensive American aid to better equip and train the national police force.

Later in the month, a visit from Egyptian Minister of Economy Dr. Abd al-Moneim Kaissouni to the U.S. reinforced the American commitment to aid Nasser. Komer deemed the visit a success, and he thought it was time to see what Nasser would do in exchange for the nearly $30 million in stabilization aid, 400,000 tons of wheat, and possible loans of approximately $51 million. Rusk argued that the U.S. could not "tie political conditions" to American aid, that the U.S. should not expect Nasser to end his efforts to unify the Arab world, or issue anti-Israeli propaganda. He did suggest that the U.S. urge Nasser to "agree to limitation of armaments in the Near East."

Rusk felt that continued aid to Nasser would bring none of these goals and that Kennedy must not demand that they do. He did believe, however, that aid to Nasser would reap rewards in a gradual orientation away from the Soviet Bloc toward the West, increased economic stability, attention to internal issues rather than pan-Arab movements, and progress toward democracy. Domestic opinion of these goals, however, was not so positive. Aspects of the press had begun to question Kennedy's policy with Egypt. The New Republic on June 25, 1962 argued that Kennedy had provided increased aid to Nasser against the recommendations of the State Department and asserted that such aid had done nothing to slow down Nasser's criticism and interference with U.S. policy in Iran and Africa.

In addition to domestic criticism, the NSC and State Department now demonstrated concern over the upcoming Economic Conference of Developing

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15 Bowles to Bundy, May 3, 1962; Komer to Bundy, May 11, 1962; and Bundy to Bowles, May 12, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
16 Badeau to Rusk, May 26, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
17 Komer to Kennedy, May 28, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
18 Rusk to Kennedy, May 28, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
Countries, in Cairo in July 1962. Attendees would be Ghana, Guinea, India, Indonesia, Mali, Somali, Sudan, U.A.R., Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Algeria, Bolivia, Brazil, Burma, Cambodia, Ceylon, Congo, Cuba, Ethiopia, Libya, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Tunisia, and Chile. The U.S. feared that the Soviets would wield undue influence at the conference via their emissaries and would stir up sentiment against the European Common Market. British officials agreed to cooperate with the U.S. in sending observers to the conference and lobbying leaders when necessary.

Nasser's opening speech at the conference on July 9 quickly dispelled Western fears because he avoided phrases that would upset the West, such as "imperialism" or "neo-colonialism," and spoke of cooperation between developing countries. The emphasis on themes such as population control and the need for international cooperation encouraged officials such as State Department Executive Secretary William Brubeck. It seemed that American policy toward Nasser was having an impact. In return for dollars, Nasser moderated his tone toward the West and encouraged a similar position in other countries in the region.

Nuclear Weapons and Disarmament

Another indication that Egyptian-American relations had progressed significantly had to do with nuclear weapons. In April 1962, the U.S. announced it would resume nuclear testing as a means of putting pressure on the Soviet Union for a Test Ban Treaty. Although Kennedy expected some kind of adverse reaction from Nasser, the latter remained silent on the issue. Congressional criticism of policy, however, increased in proportion to any increase in aid to Egypt. The press continued to argue that Nasser would use American money to buy weapons from the Soviets. An article by Roscoe...
Drummond in the *New York Herald Tribune* in June argued that American aid was responsible for increased Egyptian arms purchases from the Soviets. The State Department countered that 75 percent of the aid had been foodstuffs consumed by Egyptians, that Nasser purchased arms on credit, not with current resources; American dollars could not be responsible for any recent Egyptian arms purchases. There was, wrote one official, "no direct input-output relationship between the U.S. supply of resources and the capability and decision of the U.A.R. to buy arms from the Soviet bloc."24

Just when the administration thought it had calmed public criticism of its policy, information reached the press that Egypt had test-fired two rockets rumored to have a range of 600 kilometers.25 It took place just as Congress was debating aid to Egypt. Nasser reassured Kennedy that the rockets were defensive only, and were necessary because of Israel's nuclear project. He pointed out that he had remained quiet on the Israel issue and wished to continue to seek good relations with the West.26 It appeared that Nasser was merely trying to regain prestige among Arab states in the region, in the face of recent criticism from Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Syria that he had gone soft on Israel.

To further calm American nerves, Nasser repeated to Talbot, who was visiting Cairo, that the rockets and recent military purchases were defensive, that if other countries in the region signed an arms limitation agreement, "the U.A.R. would be a part of it." He reaffirmed a promise never to attack Israel unless it attacked first, and to keep the Palestine issue "in the refrigerator."27 Nasser told Talbot, however, that he could not gear his policy toward American domestic pressures. In general, Talbot left Egypt with the strong impression that U.S.-U.A.R. relations were at an all-time high and that a major reason was the exchange of personal letters between Kennedy and Nasser.

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24 Brubeck to Bundy, July 7, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
25 Ball to Badeau, July 21, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
26 Badeau to Rusk, July 29, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
27 Brubeck to Bundy, July 28, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
Another exchange was about to occur, this time over the impending sale of HAWK missiles to Israel. The U.S. decided to sell HAWK missiles to Israel partly to persuade Ben-Gurion to cooperate with the Johnson Plan for Arab refugees. To minimize a possible adverse reaction, Kennedy instructed the State Department to give Nasser advance warning of the impending sale. In a personal letter, Kennedy informed Nasser of reasons for the sale, and discussed the benefits of the Johnson Plan, asking for Nasser's support. He further emphasized the value of good Egyptian-American relations and expressed satisfaction on its development.

Nasser responded calmly and positively to the letter. While he argued that the missiles would make any possible arms limitation agreement in the region a moot point, he did offer moderate support for the Johnson Plan, promising to consider it further.28 To reciprocate, Kennedy planned to finally push through and announce the multi-year PL-480 package long in the planning and an additional $10 million of stabilization money to Egypt.29 In spite of trouble with the Johnson Plan and the HAWK sale to Israel, Egyptian-American relations could not have been better. American policy toward Israel would not derail the on-going rapprochement with Nasser.

The end of the summer 1962 seemed to mark a new era in policy with the Middle East. Brubeck stated that, "winds of change are blowing across the Arabian Peninsula coming mainly from the direction of Cairo."30 He cited pressure for reform in Saudi Arabia, Aden, and Yemen as positive developments, encouraged by Nasser's reform at home. Some, however, continued to be critical of American policy, including Komer, who argued in May 1962, that the administration needed to be less reactive. He also argued that perhaps Kennedy should support Israeli rights to Jordan water to put pressure on Arab countries. He saw the sale of HAWK missiles to Israel as a means to this end as well and hoped that security guarantees of some sort to both Israel and the Arab states

28 Badeau to Rusk, August 22 and 24, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
29 Bundy to Kennedy, September 16, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
30 Brubeck to Bundy, August 22, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
would force both sides to cooperate on issues of the refugees and water from the Jordan River.

It is not at all clear how Komer thought Kennedy could change this situation, but what is significant is the fact that someone saw U.S. policy as merely reactive. He urged that Kennedy put pressure on Jordan and Saudi Arabia to suppress their anti-Israeli and anti-Nasser rhetoric in return for the heavy amounts of American dollars they were receiving. He also wanted Kennedy to talk "a tough line" with Israel to urge it to cooperate on the Johnson Plan and work better with the UNTSO observers on the Sea of Galilee. In spite of Komer's advice, U.S. policy through the summer of 1962 continued to be conciliatory toward all countries in the region, especially toward Nasser. The State Department hoped that conciliatory and even-handed policies would convince Israelis and the Arab states that alliance with the West was preferable to dealing with the Soviet Bloc. Then in September 1962, civil war broke out in the little country of Yemen.

Civil War in Yemen

Signs had begun to appear that Kennedy's three-pronged plan for the Middle East was not working, and events in the autumn of 1962 confirmed it. Surprisingly, the catalyst for disaster was the small Arabian country of Yemen. What would make its internal unrest and civil war of regional significance was the involvement of other Arab states. The U.S. would try to please all sides and fail miserably.

A small country at the mouth of the Red Sea, Yemen contained little of strategic importance to the United States or its Arab neighbors. Only its location would draw the outside powers to view internal unrest there with concern. Saudi Arabia needed stability on its borders, as did the British still ensconced to Yemen's East in Aden. The last thing either nation needed was Nasserite revolution that might threaten the traditional rulers of its neighbors. King Ahmad controlled his small country, wracked by religious and tribal

31 Komer to Feldman, May 31, 1962, NSF Box 168, JFKL.
conflicts, by pitting one group against the other. Although he feared Nasserism, he entered into a loose federation with the U.A.R. in 1958 in a show of Arab unity. When Ahmad died on September 19, 1962, his son Muhammed al-Badr became king or imam.

One week later, September 26, a group of revolutionaries, mostly young army officers led by Colonel Abdullah al-Sallal, toppled al-Badr from power. Sallal claimed to be the liberator and modernizer of Yemen, and called for the liberation of neighboring Aden from British rule. Fearing a Nasserite revolt in their own kingdom, King Saud and Crown Prince Faisal began funneling weapons to al-Badr, who had fled to the hills. In response, Nasser quickly recognized the new regime in Yemen and dispatched Egyptian troops to bolster Sallal's new government. Eventually, these troops would grow to 70,000.

Although Nasser's motives in Yemen are still debated, it is most likely that he sought to bolster his position as leader of Arab nationalism in the wake of the Syrian defection from the U.A.R. After the rise of Qasim and the persecution of Nasserists in Iraq, Nasser had drawn closer to reactionary regimes like Jordan and Saudi Arabia. This alignment, however, called into question Nasser's leadership of pan-Arabism. When Syria broke away from the U.A.R., it was a severe blow to Nasser's leadership and to counter Iraqi and Syrian challenges, Nasser needed to display his revolutionary nature. Nasser had spoken about the need for the Arab proletariat to unite and overthrow old, repressive regimes. When the new Yemeni regime asked for help, Nasser could not refuse. He expected the operation to be brief and successful.

Ironically, King Ahmad's decision to purchase Soviet military hardware in previous years (following Nasser's example) enabled the Yemini military to launch a

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32 Rusk to Kennedy, Developments in Yemen, Faisal Briefing Book, October 3, 1962, NSF Box 158, JFKL.


successful coup. The American response was mild and cautious. Unwilling to spoil recent gains in the U.S.-Egyptian relationship, Kennedy continued negotiations for aid to Egypt and largely ignored the Yemen issue until pressed by the Saudis. American policy from the beginning was simple: keep any government in Yemen from leaning toward the Soviet bloc, continue aid for a new road project, and attempt to thwart outside military intervention. The Saudis, however, believed that American rapprochement with Nasser meant he had become their "chosen instrument" in the region. Nasser's involvement in Yemen and his statements to the press that the Saudis would be the next candidates for revolution convinced Faisal that U.S. policy needed to change.

Saudi Arabia became extremely nervous as rumors abounded that a number of Saudi pilots in the South had defected to the revolutionaries in Yemen. Shortly thereafter, Crown Prince Faisal visited the United States and met with Kennedy and others to discuss both the future of U.S.-Saudi relations and the Yemeni crisis. Kennedy tried to calm Faisal's fears, listing the evidence of U.S. friendship with Saudi Arabia. The list included a recent arms sale agreement worth $13.5 million dollars, three radio transmitters, and expert studies on the Saudi economy. The U.S. had also recently proposed to sell them the new F-5A fighter planes and had a training mission posted at the Dhahran Airfield. All this provided ample evidence, according to Komer, that the Saudi-American friendship was strong.  

As Faisal visited with Kennedy and others, Talbot had a meeting with Faisal's aide, Dr. Rashad Firaawan. Firaawan argued forcefully that U.S. interest in the Yemeni conflict should be intense because of the threat of communism to the area. He believed that the Imam had kept the country peaceful and free of communist influence, if not fully

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36 Rusk to Kennedy, Talking Outline, Faisal Briefing Book, October 3, 1962, NSF Box 158, JFKL.
37 Komer to Kennedy, Faisal Briefing Book, October 4, 1962, NSF Box 158, JFKL.
38 Rountree to Rusk, October 8, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
progressive, but that the republicans would open Yemen up to Soviet infiltration. Firaawan also raised again the argument that Nasser was using American aid against Yemeni royalists, as well as against Saudi Arabia. Talbot argued that this was not the case; that U.S. aid to the U.A.R. was mostly in the form of food. He also asserted that Kennedy intended all American aid, whether to the U.A.R., Syria, Iraq, or the Saudis, to help "the Arab countries advance themselves." 39

Now, war in Yemen was thwarting this plan for development. The United States did intend to limit Soviet access to the region, and thus, to oil. Kennedy and his advisors thought the best way to do so was to serve as mediator in Yemen and convince all outside parties to pull out. All of Kennedy's plans for the Middle East, such as a solution for the Arab refugees, were in jeopardy over this civil war. Faisal informed Kennedy that not only Nasser, but also communists supported the coup in Yemen. His proof for this was the fact that the U.A.R. and the Soviet Union immediately recognized the new government. Kennedy, while sympathetic with Faisal's concerns, tried to explain that American influence over Nasser was limited. He did not believe that any threat to withhold U.S. aid would convince him to change his foreign policy. Nonetheless, by the end of the conversation, Kennedy had offered to arrange a visit of some American navy vessels to Jidda as a sign of support of the Saudi regime. Faisal thought this would be a welcome gesture.40

Meanwhile, Egyptian-American relations continued as though nothing had happened. In early October, Egypt inquired about purchasing military equipment from the U.S.41 The State Department thought that fulfilling such a request so soon after the HAWK sale to Israel would send the wrong kind of message. Badeau suggested the U.S. sell transport aircraft to Egypt, which it desperately needed. This act would show

39 Memorandum of Conversation, Talbot and Dr. Rashad Fir'awn, Washington D.C., October 3, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
40 Memorandum of Conversation, Kennedy and Faisal, Washington D.C., October 5, 1962, NSF Box 147, JFKL.
41 Badeau to Rusk, October 4, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
American goodwill without contributing to an arms race in the region. Komer urged Kennedy to push through the PL-480 aid agreement long in the making to avoid the appearance of an American judgment on Nasser's actions in Yemen. Kennedy complied the same day, in spite of concern that such aid might in fact look like support for Nasser's intervention.

Conversations between the U.S. and Egypt on events in Yemen centered on Kennedy's desire to promote stability there, and on Nasser's determination to aid and lead a nationalist revolution. In early October, the U.S. made it clear that it would not stand by if outside powers went to war with each other over Yemen. Egypt retorted that the U.S. had already made its position on the Middle East clear with its sale of HAWK missiles to Israel. Nasser ignored American warnings as he moved his troops toward the Red Sea. Badeau urged Rusk to advise the President not to over-react, as the "Egyptians have demonstrated their proven capacity to wear out their welcome in other Arab states."

Of course, Kennedy's attention in October 1962 focused on the Cuban Missile Crisis, not on Nasser's intervention in Yemen. Badeau continued to caution Rusk about over-extending in Yemen, but there is little evidence that Kennedy learned much, if anything, of the discussion. Badeau argued that the only tool Kennedy had to use was the threat of canceling sales and loans to Nasser; the cost of such a policy would be further Egyptian reliance on Soviet assistance. Instead, the U.S. continued to talk to Nasser about the need for stability in the Arabian Peninsula, and Nasser avoided making any promises, while maintaining that he was always open to hear the American point of view.

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42 Komer to Kennedy, October 5, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
43 Donald C. Bergus (Counselor of Embassy for Political Affairs) to Rusk, October 5, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
44 Ball to Area Embassies, October 5, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
45 Badeau to Rusk, October 24, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
46 Badeau to Rusk, October 25, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
47 Badeau to Rusk, November 2, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
Royal Regimes and the Yemeni Conflict

Meanwhile, the Yemen crisis came to dominate Saudi-American relations. The State Department and NSC, however, continued to discuss political and social reforms, hoping to deflect further criticism from Nasser. King Saud was very ill by this time and Faisal was wielding power. Perhaps in order to appease the U.S. and ensure its help against Nasser, Faisal announced a series of reforms for his country in November 1962. Some of these reforms included road and sanitation projects, more freedom of the press and better education. He also called for the abolition of slavery, but did not say how he would accomplish this objective.\textsuperscript{48} Amidst these plans for reform, the Saudis continued to press the U.S. to not recognize the rebel regime in Yemen, and to pressure Nasser to get out. Kennedy declined to give any such promises, explaining that he had to protect the 150 Americans in Yemen by maintaining a good relationship.

The State Department had long been concerned about the stability of the royal regime in Saudi Arabia. Rusk was concerned that the crisis in Yemen and Nasser's threats would induce the King to neglect necessary internal reforms, possibly provoking a revolution. He thus continued to encourage Faisal to fulfill his promises of reforms and to withdraw from Yemen in order to concentrate on internal issues. Rusk was also concerned that the Saudis were now trying to purchase aircraft from the French, perhaps because the U.S. was discouraging any buildup of American aircraft. Rusk quietly informed France that the U.S. wanted to continue to be the sole supplier of military equipment to Saudi Arabia, but that it did not want the Saudis to know it was blocking their purchase attempts.\textsuperscript{49}

\textsuperscript{48} Memorandum of Conversation, Ambassador Parker T. Hart and Dr. Fir'awn, Jidda, November 3, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{49} Rusk to Ambassador in Cairo, November 19, 1962; Rusk to Ambassador in Paris, November 21, 1962; and Hart to Rusk, November 27, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
Rusk also would be concerned over Saudi talks with Britain and West Germany over possible purchase of torpedo boats. Kennedy again tried to discourage such purchases, in order to continue to be the sole military supplier. The Saudis were frightened enough of Nasser's actions in Yemen to be willing to go around their American ally to buy added security. Rusk proposed sending a U.S. AID mission to Saudi Arabia, a group of technicians and economic planners who would serve two-year terms in Saudi Arabia, to assist in Faisal's reforms.

Conditions became more serious in mid November 1962, when Egyptian warships began shelling the Saudi port of Muwassam. This action, along with previous reports of aerial bombings, created deep concern within the Kennedy administration. Nasser claimed that his actions were merely a response to reports that the Saudis and Jordan had sent several thousand troops to aid al-Badr. U.S. intelligence could not confirm such reports and doubted very much that they were genuine. Nasser asserted that Sallal had requested his troops in Yemen and would leave if requested. He made it clear, however, that he would not tolerate outside interference in a justified revolution of the Yemeni people.

Egypt continued shelling Saudi territory ostensibly to protect the revolutionary regime in Yemen, and the U.S. withheld recognition of Sallal's government. The State Department informed Nasser that American recognition would likely come when all outside forces were withdrawn from Yemen, and not before. The United States also cautioned Nasser that the Saudi monarchy was stable and beginning the process of reform under Prince Faisal, and that the U.S. saw no feasible alternative to this regime. Rusk sent this statement to Egypt in response to Nasser's hints that the Saudi people should

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50 Air Force to White House, Joint Chiefs of Staff, U.S. Embassy in Saudi Arabia, December 4, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
51 Rusk to Embassy in Jidda, November 27, 1962, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
52 Rusk to Badeau, November 6, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
53 Rusk to Badeau, November 8, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL; and Heikal, The Cairo Documents, 215-216.
overthrow the royal regime. In further meetings between U.S. and Egyptian officials in November, Talbot made it clear that the two countries shared similar goals:

The United States favors progress and reform; indeed we are trying to bring about a peaceful economic and social revolution in Latin America and elsewhere. Thus, though we may occasionally disagree with the U.A.R. on methods, we do not necessarily disagree on goals. It ought to be possible to keep our respective policies in harmony.

It is clear that the U.S. wished to continue rapprochement with Nasser, in spite of the problem with Yemen, and that they hoped to talk him into disengagement. The Americans also intended to stand by their Saudi allies.

Late in the year, Bundy and Komer reminded Nasser's foreign minister, Zulficar Sabri, that the U.S. planned to recognize the new regime in Yemen once disengagement had occurred. Sabri retorted that the U.A.R. would welcome disengagement, but that the Saudis had just recently sent 5,000 troops into Yemen, which resulted in fighting that left 3,000 dead. To further complicate the issue, the Egyptian press began reporting that the Saudis and Jordan were receiving Israeli support for their interference in Yemen, and implied that Kennedy was withholding recognition of Sallal's regime because of Israeli pressure. In light of this negative press, the President began seriously to consider recognition.

On December 19, 1962 the U.S. extended official recognition to the Sallal regime in Yemen, hoping this action would further persuade both the Saudis and Egyptians to withdraw. Shortly thereafter, Kennedy received a telegram from Imam al-Badr, begging him to reconsider recognition of the new government. He argued that Egypt had sponsored and supported the coup and that it was an invasion by a foreign country. He

54 Rusk to Badeau, November 8, 1962; and Komer to Bundy, November 9, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
55 Talbot to Rusk, November 9, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
57 Rusk to Area Embassies, November 10, 1962; and Badeau to Rusk, November 30, 1962, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
used as proof the fact that just after the coup, "Egyptian arms and equipment arrived by ship, which must have left Egypt before its outbreak." He then asked that Kennedy send an envoy to Yemen to discover the facts for themselves. The Imam was certain that most of the population still supported him and would assist him as his troops regained control. The State Department also received word in late December that al-Badr’s forces had stopped executing captured enemy soldiers and were taking them as prisoners instead, perhaps in order to win U.S. support.

By the end of the year, conditions were no better in Yemen; in fact, the war was taking a turn for the worse. On December 31, Faisal sent an urgent message to Kennedy via the American embassy regarding events in Yemen. There had been a number of air attacks from Yemen by Egyptian planes during November, and the Saudis had not retaliated. Now, more such attacks had occurred and Faisal was frightened. The day before he sent his message, an Egyptian bomber attacked the Najran Airfield in Saudi Arabia for about twenty-five minutes, dropping nine bombs and strafing the area with machine-gun fire. Three hours later, two more bombers attacked the airfield. The next day, there were two more such attacks, resulting in several deaths and at least a dozen injured.

While Saudi Arabia had previously endured such attacks and had not retaliated, Faisal was now very angry and worried about invasion. He wanted to know if the U.S. would support him if Egypt invaded his country. He argued that diplomacy had failed, that it was now time for something more. He asked that the U.S. "make an official declaration to [the] effect [that the] U.S. government assures [the Saudis] of its complete support in defense of sovereign Saudi Arabian territory." Now Kennedy would have to
decide whether to stay aloof, pleasing Nasser, or calm the nerves of its ally in the Arabian Peninsula. It seemed that Kennedy's tightrope had stretched to the breaking point.

Although the President did not respond directly to Faisal for almost two months, he did send reassurances via diplomats and asked the NSC to begin discussing options. In February 1962, Kennedy wrote a personal letter to Faisal, assuring him that the United States cared about what was happening in Yemen and would continue to strongly support Saudi Arabia. Nevertheless, he did specify to Faisal that the United States wanted to assist stable regimes that made internal reform a priority. In other words, Kennedy would help Faisal if he became a social reformer.61

In order to procure support from the United States, Faisal reluctantly agreed to institute reforms that Kennedy and the State Department had been urging. Earlier in November 1962, Faisal had announced a ten-point program that abolished slavery, and created councils to allow religious leaders and the common people more participation in government. This limited program, however, was as far as the reform extended and as soon as Kennedy looked away (toward Vietnam), Faisal reversed his course.62

The U.A.R. and Saudi Arabia were the major players in Yemen, but Jordan also would be keenly interested. King Hussein's criticism of U.S. aid to Nasser now increased as he watched events in Yemen with alarm.63 He was also concerned about growing pan-Arab rhetoric in Iraq and Syria, all of which made him feel insecure about his own regime. As always, Kennedy sought to reassure Hussein of his support and of moderate regimes in general. The King warned Kennedy that he was certain Iraq was also bound for revolution, but Macomber informed Hussein that the U.S. did not believe it should interfere.

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61 Kennedy to Faisal, February 25, 1962, POF Box 123b, JFKL.
63 Macomber to Rusk, October 17, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
At first, the impact of the Yemeni civil war on Jordan was not clear. Warning signs began to appear, however, when Kamal Shaer, vice president of the Jordan Development Board, resigned in protest over Hussein’s opposition to the revolt in Yemen. This event worried the State Department because Shaer had been an important proponent of reform in Prime Minister Tal’s government. Even so, U.S.-Jordanian relations went on as usual, with the conclusion of a scheduled sale and delivery of six Hawker Hunter aircraft.64

Hussein’s fears increased when he received rumors in early November that Egyptian and Yemeni forces were sailing up the Yemen coast toward Jordan.65 Although the rumors were unfounded, the continuing attacks across the Saudi border only served to exacerbate his fears of invasion. King Saud sent a message to Hussein, asking for aircraft (the new Hawker Hunters) to help ward off these attacks. Ambassador Macomber tried to dissuade Hussein from sending the planes, arguing that they would not really help the Saudis, and would only give Nasser a better excuse for intervention. Jordan felt obligated to support its ally and sent planes. Then the State Department asked Faisal to request the withdrawal of the Jordanian planes, but he refused.66

By mid November, Jordanian aircraft were operating in Saudi Arabia, but confined their activity to the Saudi borders. Previously, a couple of Jordanian pilots defected to Yemen. Rusk feared that Jordanian planes in Saudi Arabia would create a security risk for Hussein’s regime from Baathist opponents.67 Tal, however, did not bend to American pressure and seemed willing to sacrifice his regime for what he considered principle. Macomber informed the State Department that he feared Tal was “jeopardizing

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64 Macomber to Rusk, October 18, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL; and U.S. Army Report from Amman, Jordan to Rusk, October 23, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
65 Macomber to Rusk, November 7, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
66 Rusk to Macomber, November 7, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL; and Macomber to Rusk, November 15, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
67 Macomber to Rusk, November 14, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.

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[the] life [of] his government," making Hussein's regime vulnerable to a Nasserist coup. He also feared this would set back long-awaited reform programs in Jordan.68

If Macomber was upset at Tal, Hussein was generally upset with his Western allies. In December, he informed Macomber that Jordan and Saudi Arabia "stood out like [a] sore thumb" because of their alliance with the West, and in spite of their loyalty, the West ignored them, while coddling Nasser.69 Hussein and Faisal had threatened to open diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union if the U.S. recognized the al-Sallal regime in Yemen. Hussein argued he must deal with the U.S.S.R. because perhaps the Soviets would sell him proper military equipment, as opposed to the outdated material he received from the West.

The British and Yemen

With the exception of the HAWK sale to Israel, U.S.-U.K. relations had been fairly smooth. Even though the U.S. was reluctant to pledge support to the British during the Kuwait crisis, both countries did eventually cooperate. The relationship, while certainly not equal, was the best it had been since the Suez crisis of 1956. The civil war in Yemen, however, threatened to damage that relationship.

Macmillan and Kennedy liked each other and respected the other's opinions from the start, but Macmillan became very frustrated with the President over Yemen. In Macmillan's view, the U.S. needed to use recognition of the new government only as a reward for Nasser's withdrawal. Macmillan wrote Kennedy:

The danger seems to be that if you play your cards, above all recognition, too soon in exchange for mere words, you may lose all power to influence events. I therefore feel that you should get something more than words before you give recognition and money....You might insist as a first step on the withdrawal of the U.A.R. air force from Yemen.70

68 Komer to Kennedy, December 5, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
69 Macomber to Rusk, December 5, 1962, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
Kennedy believed, however, that if he did not recognize the new regime in Yemen, it would turn to the Soviets for support. He thought he could persuade Nasser to withdraw if Yemen had recognition.71

Macmillan was particularly concerned about events in Yemen because of British operations in the region. The U.K. was in the process of negotiating a merger of all the independent, small Emirates in the Gulf region and then, planned to join Aden to them. The British completed the merger in early 1963 without incident, but eventually, the conflict in Yemen did threaten Aden and forced the British to abandon its base there in 1966. Even so, the British did gain one benefit from the crisis in Yemen. Saudi Arabia had severed relations with Britain after the Suez crisis, but now, King Saud saw the British as allies in their opposition to American recognition.72

In spite of the difference of opinion, the U.S.-U.K. relationship remained stable. Macmillan was often frustrated when the Americans did not consult with the British or take their concerns seriously. The two countries, however, did cooperate on several issues such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Test Ban Treaty. The British were frequently upset at American decisions about Europe and nuclear weapons deployed there, but in the Middle East, the relationship was cordial, if not always in lock-step.

Although the United States was usually able to ignore British interests when it chose, Middle East rulers often forced it to recognize the limits of power. Both Hussein and Faisal ignored the wishes of their superpower benefactor when they conflicted with local political aims and security issues. What was important to them was preservation of their regimes, not which superpower they sided with or whether or not the United States

71 Ibid., 272.
72 Macmillan, At the End of the Day, 275.
was pleased with them. If Kennedy would not give them aid, the Soviets would, so the real risk was not going against their American allies, but cooperating with them.
CHAPTER 9

DOMINOES OF ARAB NATIONALISM

Even though the war in Yemen would be the major focus of U.S.-Middle East relations from September 1962 through the rest of Kennedy's tenure, there were other issues just as deadly. The year 1963 brought a revolution that overthrew Qasim in Iraq, a Baathist revolt in Syria, and a declaration of pan-Arab union between these two countries and Egypt. It soon appeared that the Yemen crisis was only a small problem compared with growing tides of Arab nationalism among neutralist states.

Revolution In Iraq

While Iraq had been the Middle East country over which the U.S. had the least amount of influence, it continued to be an area of importance, particularly as a possible threat to Kuwait. To counter this danger and stop communist in-roads into Iran, the State Department began in early 1962 to take small steps toward better U.S.-Iraqi relations. Most important, Kennedy's advisors kept the U.S. out of the dispute between the Iraqi government and the Iraqi Petroleum Company (of which two American oil companies were a part), only offering to arbitrate if requested.1 In April 1962, the State Department issued a lengthy study of U.S.-Iraqi relations and provided a list of suggestions to improve the relationship. Among these proposals were efforts to promote cultural exchange, increase trade, and sending agricultural and educational personnel.2 Policy-makers hoped that through steady low-key, cooperation, the U.S. would gain some access to the Iraqi economy and culture, leading to political influence in the long-term.

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1 Rusk to London Embassy, January 2, 1962, NSF box 117, JFKL.
2 Department of State, Guidelines for Policy and Operations, April 1962, NSF box 117, JFKL.

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Generally, the U.S. kept to this policy throughout the year in spite of a number of minor conflicts. It was in the spring of 1962 that recognition of Kuwaiti independence and the exchange of ambassadors led to Iraq withdrawing its ambassador from Washington and asking for the withdrawal of the American ambassador in Baghdad. From time to time, accusations that the U.S. was behind the recent renewal of Kurdish unrest in the North would surface and further strain U.S.-Iraqi relations. Qasim frequently blamed the violence on outside imperialists. Aside from a few protests, Kennedy generally tried to ignore the bellicose statements.

For the most part, the U.S. was content to keep relations calm with Qasim, if not cozy. Most analysts assumed that Qasim could not last, as all evidence seemed to suggest his power-base was rapidly eroding. He had, as the Italian ambassador to Iraq, Renato D'Isasca, asserted, "accomplished little or nothing" as prime minister and had by mid 1962, only the support of the army. Even military support was at risk and morale low in anticipation of heavy losses in suppressing the latest Kurd uprising. The American embassy concurred with the Italian assessment and advised the State Department to wait patiently. The Ambassador did not think that any possible coup or assassination would necessarily lead to a pro-communist regime. Others, however, were concerned and reminded policy-makers that communists might very well take advantage of a period of instability to assert more influence.

Aside from continuing strains from Kurdish behavior and Iraqi accusations of American involvement, the rest of 1962 produced generally cordial relations between the U.S. and Iraq. In December more charges of American involvement in the Kurdish

3 Jernegan to Rusk, April 5, 1962, and Ball to Jernegan, May 26, 1962, both in NSF Box 117, JFKL.
4 Hilsman to Rusk, April 11, 1962; and Melbourne to Rusk, October 1, 1962, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
5 Jernegan to Rusk, June 1, 1962, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
6 Brubeck to Bundy, June 20, 1962; and Melbourne to Rusk, September 26, 1962, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
uprising prompted Rusk to send a message to Qasim that the U.S. "has followed a consistent policy of seeking friendly relations while respecting Iraq's right to follow a non-aligned course." Even though the U.S. had no intent to intervene, the State Department kept a very close watch on the military situation inside Iraq. Reports from early 1963 indicated Qasim's continuing military weakness and the fact that the Kurdish rebels were in control of most of Kurdistan.

Although the issue of Kuwait had caused a break in diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Iraq, Kennedy's major concern with that country was communist influence. Reports in January 1963 indicated that the Soviets had achieved some major gains in Iraq. The main causes of concern included a high level of military sales from the Soviets, a tendency to take the Soviet propaganda line in public statements, heavy economic and industrial aid from the Eastern bloc, and Qasim's continuing hostility toward the West or any Arab countries seen as favorable toward the United States. These and other factors created significant concern in the State Department, but no one had any idea on how to combat this influence. Rusk and Brubeck could only suggest encouraging the American Chargé to seek meetings with Qasim to express American viewpoints.

By the end of January, it was clear that Qasim was in serious political trouble and that his operations against the Kurds in the North were failing. He increasingly lashed out at the United States as the cause of his troubles and as these attacks became both more frequent and vitriolic, Kennedy began to consider stronger statements of protest. If some kind of a coup were to take place, he wanted to be sure to make clear that the U.S. disassociated itself from Iraq's president.

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7 Rusk to Melbourne, December 3, 1962, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
8 Melbourne to Rusk, January 17 and 18, 1962, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
9 Melbourne to Rusk, January 19, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
10 Brubeck to Bundy, January 21, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL; and Melbourne to Rusk, February 7, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
11 Melbourne to Rusk, January 25, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
Qasim's relationship with the rest of the region was, in fact, poor. Baathist leaders became frustrated with his government and feared outside intervention while the country was distracted with the Kurds. Qasim had managed to alienate the West and damage relations with Jordan and Saudi Arabia by purchasing arms from the Soviets and threatening Kuwait. Qasim had also desired leadership of the Arab world and saw Nasser as a rival and a threat, so his relationship with Egypt and Syria was shaky. Baathist leaders inside Iraq felt that the country was completely isolated from the rest of the region because of Qasim's policies and rhetoric. Qasim's flirtation with communist parties inside Iraq to maintain power against other Baathist critics only further angered his party.

The coup began on February 8, 1963 and in a matter of hours, Qasim was executed, his body shown on T.V., and most of his ministers were under arrest. A group of army officers, with help from both Baathist and Nationalist party sympathizers, took over the government and quickly established control. Colonel Abdul Salam Arif became president and Ahmed Hasan al-Bakr became vice president. Arif had been an important part of the leadership of the 1958 revolution, but later opposed Qasim's policies that alienated Iraq from the rest of the pan-Arabists. Ahmed al-Bakr was, like Arif, a Baathist and supporter of pan-Arab unity. At first, neighboring countries such as Iran and Turkey were nervous, anticipating a possible pan-Arab coup sponsored by Nasser. The State Department soon determined that those in charge were acting on their own with no assistance from Nasser, and that this coup had widespread public support in Iraq. With this information, Rusk sent instructions to the U.S. Chargé on criteria for American dealing with the new regime, and recommended granting recognition as soon as it met

12 Safran, From War to War, 236-7.
13 Jones to Rusk, February 8, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
14 Al-Bakr would later lead another coup against Arif in 1968 and serve as president until Saddam Hussein's coup in 1979.
certain conditions. Other Arab countries were less cautious and Jordan the following day was the first to recognize the new government.

Although information came slowly, Melbourne was quick to reassure Rusk that his sources indicated both the anti-communist nature of the coup and the lack of connection with Nasser. While interest in communist influence was understandable, the concern with Nasser's power was interesting. One of the major prongs of Kennedy's Middle East policy had been rapprochement with Nasser and improved relations with Egypt. But the war in Yemen created fear about Nasser's reach and many saw a stable Iraq as an important balance to growing Egyptian power. While Kennedy wanted to show himself as a friend of the Arab states and gave lip service to pan-Arab nationalism, he was also reluctant to support such a union if it was controlled by Nasser.

American reaction to the coup in Iraq was cautious, yet generally supportive. All analysts agreed that any regime that was not blatantly pro-communist would be preferable to Qasim. The main concern in the first few days was to make it clear the U.S. had absolutely no involvement in what Rusk called a "completely indigenous" coup. On February 11, the U.S. gave formal recognition to the new regime.

A British report from Baghdad on the same day offered an optimistic analysis of the new regime. The author reported that the new government was dedicated to the revolution of 1958, believed in "the unity of the people, the rule of law...and a united Arab struggle against imperialism..." He also expected the new regime to concentrate on domestic issues and avoid dictatorship, both good signs for Western interests. While

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15 Rusk to Melbourne, February 9, 1963; and Rusk to Kennedy, February 9, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
16 Macomber to Rusk, February 9, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL; see also Malcolm Kerr, The Arab Cold War, 55-57.
17 Melbourne to Rusk, February 8, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
18 Rusk to Embassies, February 9 and 10, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
19 No Author, Baghdad to Foreign Office, February 11, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
he did not expect Iraq to drop its claims against Kuwait, he did think the regime would sideline this issue in order to establish better relations with the West.

Subsequent reports soon spoke of the roundup of communists and the execution of those who resisted. Perhaps because of this element and lack of indication that connected the new regime to Nasser, Saudi Arabia was quick to recognize the leaders and praise the coup. Ambassador Hart found Saudi optimism ironic considering its reaction to a similar coup in Yemen. The Saudis could tolerate a nationalist regime in Iraq as long as it was clearly independent of Nasser.

By February 14, Roger Hilsman, a member of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research in the State Department, had prepared a detailed intelligence report for Rusk assessing the impact of the Iraqi coup on the region. The most important observation was that the U.A.R. had no real hand in or influence over the coup and that its attitude toward Iraq would be both supportive and cautious. Hilsman suggested that Syria could possibly be the most affected by the coup, as that country had typically been a "bone of contention" between Egypt and Iraq. He also predicted that Lebanon could be used as a base for Egyptian activity against Syria, to forestall any Iraqi influence. Hilsman's report indicated continued American concern over pan-Arab nationalism. Publicly, the State Department verbally assured Nasser and the new regime in Iraq that it was not going to get involved. In a dispatch to all Middle East Embassies, Undersecretary of State George Ball stated:

You may assure Nasser that our policy is exactly what it purports to be namely to deal impartially on bilateral basis with all states in area...We are not repeat not supporting and shall not support any Arab unity movement, nor shall we consciously seek to impede such unity movements as may develop....

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20 Melbourne to Rusk, February 12, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
21 Hart to Rusk, February 14, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
22 Hilsman to Rusk, February 14, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
23 Ball to Embassies, February 14, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
Ball made this statement to reassure Nasser that the U.S. would not support a union of Iraq and Syria against Egypt or vice versa. He wanted to convince Nasser that the United States would remain neutral regarding regional affairs. But concern was high, since any unity plans could threaten the power of the U.S. to influence Middle East affairs and counter Soviet influence.

While the U.S. was adjusting to the coup, the Iraqi people were embracing the new regime. Reports flowed into Washington that the new government had won the support of the Iraqi business sector, and that this change had dealt the Soviet position a severe blow.24 One of the most interesting assessments from Hilsman also indicated that the Soviets felt much the same as the United States about pan-Arab unity. If Nasserism spread throughout the Middle East, then presumably, the region would become less dependent on Soviet arms and materials. According to Hilsman's analysis, the Soviets also would like to see a stronger Iraq as a counterweight to Nasser.25 In spite of persecution, arrests and some execution of Communist Party members in Iraq, the Soviets would continue to seek a good relationship with the new regime. The implication was clear: although Soviet policy had received a deadly blow in Iraq, the U.S. must remain vigilant and not assume that a communist threat had disappeared from that country.

One of the more optimistic parts of Hilsman's report dealt with the Kurdish issue. It appeared the new regime would work hard to grant Kurdish demands for more autonomy in exchange for peace. As a gesture of good will, it appointed two Kurds to cabinet positions in the new government. Hilsman predicted that Iraq would continue to receive aid from the Eastern bloc, but now probably would seek it from the West also, leading to a truly non-aligned position. This development, as opposed to the anti-Western stance of Qasim, was certainly a favorable change for the U.S.

24 Melbourne to Rusk, February 16, and Hilsman to Rusk, February 15, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
25 Hilsman to Rusk, February 15, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
Other analysts were less optimistic than Hilsman. While many agreed that the new
government represented a marked improvement over Qasim, some recognized that the
coup could create new pressure from Nasser. William Brubeck reported to Bundy that
while many forces would work in the West's favor, the fact that the Baathist party was
part of this coup would bother Nasser. Brubeck worried that this strengthening of the
Baathist party would spread to Syria and Jordan, forcing Nasser to interfere more directly
in those countries. Iraq might then seek to assist the Baathists in Jordan, which Israel
would probably not tolerate. He also worried that a frustrated Nasser might move closer
to the Soviets to combat the spread of Iraqi influence. It was becoming clear that
navigating the "Arab Cold War" would be much more difficult than Kennedy's
administration had estimated.

After being uncharacteristically silent, Komer finally offered his opinion on
events in Iraq on February 20. In a memo to Kennedy, he urged that the U.S. not look too
eager to give money to the new regime, but to "let them come to us." He also cautioned
vigilance and urged Kennedy take opportunities to aid Iraq to counter Soviet pressure.
Rusk heeded his advice and subsequent instructions from the State Department to the
Chargé in Iraq advocated a "sober, low-key" approach to the government along with
"expressions of goodwill."

Rusk also made it clear that although the U.S. proclaimed non-intervention in the
internal affairs of independent states, it would seek to influence the Iraqi revolution if it
went astray. He stated:

We would hope to convince GOI of constructive role which private capital and
foreign investment under many circumstances have played in development of all
non-communist societies, while recognizing that Iraq economic policy and
organization are strictly internal Iraqi matters.

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26 Brubeck to Bundy, February 16, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
27 Komer to Kennedy, February 20, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
28 Rusk to Baghdad, February 21; and Rusk to Kennedy, February 22, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
29 Rusk to Kennedy, February 22, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
While proclaiming a non-interference policy, Rusk made it clear that the U.S. had a certain kind of republicanism in mind for Iraq and would try to "convince" it of the benefits of capitalism. While this policy might very well have been in the American economic best interest, it was certainly not a policy of non-interference.

In weeks following the coup, American diplomats in Iraq, particularly Chargé Melbourne, kept close tabs on several critical issues, one of which was the Kurdish situation. Although both sides in the conflict had been optimistic immediately following the coup, some problems had arisen. Both sides promised to release prisoners and the Kurds demonstrated their good faith by fulfilling their part, but there were delays in releasing Kurdish prisoners. Defense Minister Ammash insisted that part of the problem had to do with Nasser's encouragement of the Kurdish rebels. Therefore, the Kurds planned to ask the U.A.R. for a statement that it would not intervene. In fact, the Kurds were planning to ask Nasser to advise "all groups not [to] use [the] Kurdish issue as [an] inter-Arab political football." 30

Even though Nasser stayed out of the political melee, the situation rapidly deteriorated. Arif and al-Bakr had led the Kurds to believe that they would be open to an autonomy agreement, but now the Iraqi government would only agree to what it called "cultural autonomy."31 This principle recognized only the right of the Kurds to use their own language and to teach it in schools, and would not apply to local government at all. Since this was far from what the Kurds had expected, both sides began to prepare for the resumption of armed conflict. Ammash was particularly concerned that Arab communists would be a significant aid to the Kurds if fighting resumed. It could also bring on conflict between Baathist and non-Baathist elements in the new regime, perhaps even toppling it.

In light of these problems, Melbourne recommended that the U.S. continue to stand back to avoid any close association with the new Iraqi government. He suggested

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30 Melbourne to Rusk, March 1, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
31 Ibid.
that Kennedy be prepared to provide aid if approached by Iraq, but to encourage private, 
American enterprise to meet any such requests instead of the federal government. This 
would both save the government money in an already stretched Middle East budget, and 
tainting the new Iraq regime by a tight, Western alliance. He also suggested that the U.S. 
be prepared to provide humanitarian aid if the Kurdish uprising resumed.32

In a surprising turn of events in mid March 1963, three delegates from Iraq went 
to Cairo to discuss a possible union with the U.A.R. Although Melbourne did not think 
any immediate agreement would occur, he believed most Iraqis were generally favorable 
to the idea of Arab unity.33 Nasser was happy to hold discussions on a possible Arab 
union, as long as Egypt would lead it. He also thought movement should be very slow 
toward that end and was not eager to create a union only to have it fall apart again. He 
believed that Syrian and Iraqi officials were considering such discussions only because of 
public pressure, not a genuine desire for union.34 Nasser was unprepared to allow in 
Egypt what the Baathists wanted in both Syria and Iraq: complete freedom of the press 
and free political parties.

In spite of its preoccupation with talk about unity, the Iraqi government continued 
to prepare for renewed hostilities with the Kurds. On March 23, American and other 
foreign attaches met with Air Brigadier Hardan Ubdul Ghaffar Al-Tikriti to discuss air 
force needs. Tikriti made it clear that Iraq needed outside assistance, but would not accept 
any with "strings attached."35 He intended to keep looking until he found such needed 
equipment from anyone willing to supply it. The American Ambassador recommended 
that Kennedy consider giving weapons to Iraq simply to keep Tikriti from obtaining them 
from the communist bloc. Communist supplies for Iraq would be worse than none at all, 
he said.

32 Melbourne to Rusk, March 3, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
33 Melbourne to Rusk, March 15, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
34 Badeau to Rusk, March 18, 1963. NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
35 Embassy in Baghdad to White House, March 23, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
As Kennedy hesitated, Iraqi leaders tried another tactic. In late March, Foreign
Minister Shabib had a long conversation with Melbourne, in which he intimated that the
communist threat had been much greater than initially estimated. Approximately 10,000
known communists were currently under arrest, with more possibly to follow. In the face
of this and the Kurdish threat, Shabib pleaded for American assistance.36 This argument
apparently worked. In a memo to Bundy, Harold Saunders of the NSC argued that he
wanted to support the new regime, even if it meant supporting them against the Kurds.
Otherwise, the Iraqi government would turn to other sources, possibly the Soviets.37

In April, Kennedy agreed to sell Iraq 12 helicopters and 40 light tanks, with more
aid to follow. The major problem was how to sell Iraq enough to ensure its stability and
friendliness toward the West, without creating a threat to Iraq's neighbors. On April 5,
Rusk cabled embassies in the region, asking each to coordinate with their British
counterparts in encouraging all sides to stay out of possible renewed fighting in Iraq.38 He
also urged them to argue that any kind of unified Arab force would not likely improve
anyone's internal stability. Nonetheless, on April 11, Egypt, Syria, and Iraq announced a
new Arab union. The union was, as Badeau put it, "plainly utopian."39 It was unclear how
any of the three members would be able to carry out such a union any time in the near
future. To head off any American concern, Iraqi President Arif offered reassurance that
the move would not damage growing U.S.-Iraqi relations.40

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36 Melbourne to Rusk, March 27, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
37 Harold Saunders to Bundy, April 2, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
38 Rusk to Embassies, April 5, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
39 Badeau to Rusk, April 11, 1963; and Rusk to Embassies, April 12, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
40 Melbourne to Rusk, April 28, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL; see also Kerr, The Arab Cold War, 63-101.
Kurds and Communists

What concerned the State Department most was a renewed Kurdish revolt, which seemed inevitable. American observers believed that the Soviets would likely support the Kurds and that the only real choice the U.S. had would be to stay out of the entire mess. Melbourne and others feared this conflict could create a much larger war, involving other members of the Arab union with Iran and the Soviets on the other side. The Kurds complained about American sale of helicopters and tanks to Iraq and similar British agreements. Kurdish leaders also presented evidence that Turkey had granted Iraq over-flights in the future, and that Turkish forces had moved toward the border areas. Kennedy again attempted to convince the Kurds that his support of Iraq was appropriate and that the United States would continue to stay out of what it saw as an internal problem.

To make matters worse, a coup attempt occurred in Iraq on May 26. The attempt had come from pro-Nasser groups who were upset at the Baath party's domination of the new government. Although not successful, the uprising increased concern over the strength of an Iraqi government already distracted by the Kurdish issue. Both situations could allow the Soviets to make renewed in-roads into that country. The problem moved Melbourne to issue a lengthy report to the State Department on the Soviet Bloc position in Iraq. He argued that the Soviets had made a remarkable recovery since the coup in February. Because the Soviet Union had reacted with restraint to the arrest of Iraqi communists, it managed to maintain economic ties with Iraq. For its part, the Iraqi government made a conscious effort to distinguish between Marxists in general and Iraqi-communists implicated in earlier political unrest. The communists also took hope in the

41 From the Baghdad Embassy (unsigned) to Rusk, May 1, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
42 Melbourne to Rusk, May 24, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
43 Melbourne to Rusk, May 26, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
44 Melbourne to Rusk, May 28, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
Baathist government's determination to remain independent of Nasser. This would mean that the only real ally against Nasserites would be communists.

Melbourne urged the U.S. to help negotiate a settlement between Iraq and the Iraqi Petroleum Company, encourage investment in Iraq, provide relief assistance where needed, meet requests for military sales within reason, and increase the American military training program for Iraq. In addition, he also argued that the U.S. should increase cultural exchanges and welcome Iraqi students into American universities. The Kurdish crisis soon escalated and distracted American attention from communist activities in Iraq. On June 10, the Iraqi government announced that all peaceful negotiations had failed and declared martial law throughout the Kurdish territories. The government gave the Kurds twenty-four hours to surrender or they would be attacked. The Kurds refused and after two weeks, the Iraqi government began recalling a number of military conscript classes for training. To make matters worse, stories of military atrocities against the Kurds began to circulate: reports of horrible destruction of Kurdish homes and groups of people being "dumped in uninhabited areas without provisions." On the other side, there were reports of a Kurdish leader, Brigadier Siddiq Mustafa, using Kurdish women and children as human shields against the Iraqi army. Other reports indicated that Iraqi authorities had massacred Christians suspected of assisting the Kurds.

What worried the U.S. the most was possible Soviet maneuvering to overthrow the government of Iraq and, as Melbourne put it, "make Iraq [an] open Cold War battleground." Iraq, however, continued to assure American diplomats that it intended to remain neutral and maintain cordial relations with both sides. Melbourne assured Bakr that if Iraq would be truly neutral, the U.S. would continue its friendly support. Although the Baathists were unwilling to align themselves too closely with the West, they were also

45 Melbourne to Rusk, June 10, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
46 Melbourne to Rusk, June 19, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
47 Melbourne to Rusk, June 27 and July 10, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
anxious for Western assistance. Melbourne suggested that the United States continue to quietly support Iraq, without being too blatant, the best way to counter Soviet pressures in the area.48

In July, the Soviets went so far as to present a letter to the UN Security Council, accusing Syria, Turkey, and Iran of assisting the Iraqi government in its "repression against Kurds who [are] fighting for their national rights."49 This move aroused anger and protest on the part of the Middle East countries involved. The Kurds tried to use the Soviet statement to gather American support by arguing that without Western help, the Kurds were drifting ever closer to the left.50

While the suppression of the Kurdish uprising continued, other issues plagued the new Iraqi government. Talks about a pan-Arab union between Iraq, Syria, and Egypt continued on an informal level, with Nasser fading more and more into the background. Initially, Nasser and his form of socialism were triumphant in leading unity talks, as illustrated by the provisions of the agreement reached in April. The Egyptian population, however, was not anxious for such a union and Baathists in Syria and Iraq were determined to maintain their autonomy in any kind of pan-Arab union. Syrian and Iraqi Baathist regimes increasingly associated Nasser with socialism, an ideology they did not believe would work.51

Although Syria and Iraq participated in pan-Arab talks in Cairo in late August, all sides deemed them a failure. Soon rumors began to circulate that Arif and Bakr planned dramatic changes in the cabinet to reduce the number of radical Baathists. This news must have cheered Nasser, as he obviously would gain from such a shuffle. When changes did occur, they appeared to be the opposite of what Arif and Bakr were planning. On October

48 Melbourne to Rusk, July 8, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
49 Plimpton to Rusk, July 11, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
50 Bolster to Rusk, July 24, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
51 Badeau to Rusk, April 18, 1963, NSF Box 168a; Strong to Rusk, July 29, 1963; and Melbourne to Rusk, June 11, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
7, three non-Baathist cabinet members resigned, leaving the government under the influence of the most radical elements of the Baathists.52 The major differences between these two wings of the same party centered on "the speed of implementing full socialization and ...amount of power to be shared with non-Baath groups."53 This, of course, further narrowed the support base of the government and created the possibility for armed conflict. While the Baath government had the support of the workers, the middle and upper classes felt alienated by them, fearing that any union would sacrifice control to Syria. Therefore, the most vocal and economically influential portion of the population did not support the regime.54

Throughout the rest of November 1963, various reports and rumors indicated that first one group of Baathists and then another (representing moderate and radical factions) held power. On November 13, the army attacked the Presidential Palace and began a coup to eliminate radicals and restore moderate control under Prime Minister Bakr. This development produced clashes between the moderate army and the radical National Guard.55 In an effort to keep the trouble from turning into civil war, Bakr invited the national leaders of the Syrian Baath Party to take temporary control of Iraq to restore unity. Most American diplomats agreed that no matter which faction obtained long-term control, the ability of the Baathist Party to rule Iraq had been severely damaged.56 Ambassador Strong was also convinced that Nasser would benefit from all of the recent unrest.57 This was a troublesome prospect for American policy, since the Baathists had been an important balance in the region against total Nasserite dominance.

52 Strong to Rusk, October 8, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
53 Jermegan to Rusk, November 15, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
54 Strong to Rusk, November 11, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
55 Strong to Rusk, November 13, 1963, and Cottam to Rusk, November 13, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
56 Rusk to embassies, NSC, CIA, Armed Forces and Others, November 13 and15, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
57 Strong to Rusk, November 14, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
Throughout the rest of the year, it remained unclear what the political future of Iraq and the American relationship to it would be. Komer expressed concern that Iraq and Syria were much more unstable than had been estimated. He worried that this would create "new opportunities for meddling by Nasser and the USSR" and that the Baathists would try to "divert attention from their internal squabbles by stirring up trouble with Israel." He predicted that 1964 would be a "lousy year" for American Middle East policy because of regional conflict and "the heightened pressure...to back Israel to the hilt." 58 In reality, however, the new leadership in Iraq had to create working coalitions with a variety of parties. In such an environment, the U.S. overestimated the strength of either communists or Nasserists inside Iraq.

Syria and Pan-Arabism

While Egypt and Saudi Arabia were preoccupied with Yemen, Syria was undergoing internal crises. In fact, Syrian politics was tumultuous during the entire Kennedy administration. Although some stability returned after Syria’s break from the United Arab Republic in late 1961, the following year produced more strain. During the crises with Israel over the Sea of Galilee in March and April in 1962, Syria experienced a military coup. 59 The cause for the political upheaval was mostly due to internal, political fragmentation, but it also reflected dissatisfaction of the Syrian military with the dismantling of socialist regulations on business and the dilution of agrarian reforms. Continuing clashes with Israel simply added to frustration with the regime. Although the new Syrian government promised continuing cooperation with the U.S., neighbors such as Jordan became nervous. Word began to spread that the U.A.R. flag was now flying over the capital in Damascus and that Nasser was rejoicing over his victory there. 60

58 Komer to Bundy, November 15, 1963, NSF Box 117, JFKL.
59 Knight to Bundy, March 28, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
60 Macomber to Rusk, April 2, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL; and Kerr, The Arab Cold War, 59-63.
Jordan feared that any strengthening of Nasserism would endanger his regime. To prevent this, Jordan's Foreign Minister made it clear he was willing to send troops into Syria to restore the previous government. American support and reassurances from Nasser induced Jordan to agree to stay out of Syria, diffusing a potentially dangerous situation. For the next several weeks, the U.S. could not determine who was really in control of Syria. At first, the military seemed to be in charge, then a few days later, another group replaced the first, and soon, a third switch took place. With each change, the American embassy stayed calm and assumed that diplomatic relations continued regardless of the cabinet controlling power at any time in Damascus. It was not clear whether each new government represented strong, anti-Nasserist sentiment, or was opposed to it. It was clear, however, that Nasser himself was not directly involved in the upheavals. Eventually, the army reinstated the previous President, Nazim al-Qudsi, but installed a new prime minister, Dr. Bashir al-Azma. He was a leading progressive and had served as a cabinet minister during the union with Egypt.

Throughout this period, Kennedy sought to assure Syria that there would be no American opposition to union with Egypt or any other Arab state, as long as such a move expressed the will of the Syrian people. Syria continued to reassure the U.S. that its policy would continue to be one of "non-alignment" in the Cold War. One topic that appeared in the negotiations was a proposal for building a dam on the Euphrates River, a project that would require substantial foreign assistance and the cooperation of Turkey and Iraq on equitable water usage. Syria hoped to receive aid from West Germany and/or France, but eventually, it would also request Kennedy's assistance. At first, the U.S. managed to persuade the Syrians that the current level of aid was all it could give.

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61 Rusk to Embassies, April 2, 1962; Badeau to Rusk, April 4, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
62 Knight to Rusk, April 7, 11, 26, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
63 Knight to Rusk, May 22-23, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
Talk about a reunion between Syria and Egypt continued throughout the early summer, but American policy continued to be one of "hands-off." It was important to not get involved in any possible merger, but to try to work with whatever resulted from such negotiations.64 A lengthy State Department Report on May 29 outlined U.S. views on the issue. Rusk argued that American interests might actually benefit from such a union, considering the history of instability in Syria.65 Not only would a union reduce the threat of foreign intervention in a vulnerable Syria, but would also present a stronger deterrent to Soviet penetration. Nasser's anti-communist stance was stronger than current Syrian attitudes and its continual, political instability made it susceptible to Soviet pressure.

On the other hand, such a reunion would increase the prestige of Nasser in the region, making him less likely to cooperate with American policy. Israel's sense of vulnerability would increase with a strengthened U.A.R. Other Arab countries would likely feel threatened by a stronger Nasser and make more demands for American aid. Jordan, caught in the middle, would be the most insecure and a potential target for Soviet infiltration. In the final analysis, Rusk determined that the U.S. position toward Syrian-Egyptian relations should remain as neutral as possible, since no clear advantage on one side or the other was obvious.

However, by mid summer 1962, union talks had collapsed, largely because Nasser demanded too much control.66 Opposition to union with Egypt also began to grow among certain sections of the Syrian government. Almost simultaneously, Syria began increasing pressure on the U.S. for more financial aid and a clear statement of support out of concern that American support for Nasser would encourage the latter to take Syria by force. A new Syrian foreign minister, Jamal Farra, who took office in mid summer, was particularly hostile toward Nasser. This led even the cautious Ambassador Knight to

64 Rusk to Knight, May 24, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
65 Rusk, Circular Report to Embassies, May 29, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
66 Knight to Rusk, June 10, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
recommend some kind of U.S. statement to calm Syrian nerves. Then to make matters worse, Nasser made a belligerent speech toward Syria in Alexandria on July 29, which the Syrians took as almost equivalent to a declaration of war.\textsuperscript{67}

The State Department assessed this surprise turn of events to mean that Nasser was trying to react to reports of Syrian reprisals on pro-Nasser elements in the military and elsewhere.\textsuperscript{68} Such Egyptian rhetoric frightened Lebanon, which considered any instability in Syria a threat to its own security. Ambassador Meyer in Beirut reported that the Lebanese media foretold interference in the region by the Soviets, if Nasser's belligerence continued.\textsuperscript{69} The press even printed reports that the U.S. was involved in an attempt to mediate a reunion of Egypt and Syria. This was, according to the Lebanese, "equivalent to acting as [Nasser's] agent."\textsuperscript{70}

Soon, Syrian officials would also be accusing Kennedy of favoring Nasser at the expense of the security and sovereignty of other Arab states. To make matters worse, news of the HAWK missile sale to Israel and details of the Johnson Refugee Plan reached Syria in early autumn. As Kennedy tried to reassure Syria of his friendship, the topic of the Euphrates Dam again arose. Now, the Syrians asked for U.S. help in obtaining funds for the project, and influenced by the damage caused by the HAWK sale, Kennedy contemplated the possibility. Syria had hinted that if no American aid were forthcoming, it would have to seek aid from the Soviets. Yet, for a while at least, all Middle East policy issues took a back seat as Kennedy's attention was fully engaged during the latter part of October 1962 by the Cuban Missile Crisis.

After the crisis had passed, Syrian leaders had kind words of praise for the way Kennedy had handled the Soviets.\textsuperscript{71} They also tended to sympathize with the American

\textsuperscript{67} Knight to Rusk, July 23 and 30, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{68} Rusk to Knight, July 30, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{69} Meyer to Rusk, August 2, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{70} Knight to Rusk, August 3, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
\textsuperscript{71} Knight to Rusk, October 3, 17, and 29, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
position regarding the war in Yemen. For the most part, Syria limited itself to commentary on Yemen and generally supported the new Yemeni Arab Republic. Syrian Prime Minister Azmah voiced concern over Nasser’s interference in the region and urged Kennedy to prevent further intervention in Yemen by outside forces. While endorsing some level of Arab unity and sympathy for a revolution, Syria remained almost as concerned as the traditional monarchies over Nasser’s intervention and motives. This theme would continue to plague U.S. relations with Syria, as well as other Middle East countries.

After the end of 1962, the relationship between the U.S. and Syria steadily grew stronger and American aid offset the fallout from the HAWK sale to Israel. Between 1961 and the beginning of 1963, the U.S. gave Syria a total of $47.9 million dollars in aid. Nearly 500,000 dollars went to technical assistance and the rest took the form of development grants and loans, as well as export-import bank loans and nearly $18.7 million through the Food for Peace Program. This assistance, along with an even-handed brokerage of the Syrian-Israeli border crises, promoted a good relationship. Kennedy hoped to encourage the growth of democratic institutions in the region and Syria claimed to share those goals. Foreign Minister Mahasin argued that Syria would become a special democratic "model for the area." He obviously wanted to make sure Kennedy saw Syria as a good investment.

Although Syria seemed to move closer to the West, it continued waving the banner of Arab unity. After the coup in Iraq resulting in the overthrow of Qasim, Syria proposed union with Iraq. No merger occurred, however, as both countries continued to struggle over contradictory aims: unity and sovereignty. This was the issue most misunderstood by Nasser, who hoped to unify Arab states under himself. Syria was not

72 Rusk to U.S. Embassy - Damascus, November 15, 1962, NSF Box 161a, JFKL.
73 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, January 24, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
74 Knight to Rusk, February 12, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
75 Hillsman to Rusk, February 15, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
interested in sacrificing its national identity to Nasser and it had learned this lesson the hard way between 1957-1961. Syria thus toyed with the idea of a federation with Iraq, perhaps as a check to Nasser. The Syrians still considered unity desirable, but did not want to lose their separate identity, no matter how artificial it might be.76

However, on March 8, 1963, a group of pro-Nasser military officers led a coup d’etat that overthrew the government in Syria yet again. The new National Council of Revolutionary Command proclaimed that the revolution would begin a return to Arab unity.77 During the first day of the takeover, crowds chanted in the streets for immediate union with Egypt and Iraq. The leader of the coup, army Colonel Ziyal Hariri, had visited Syrian President Qudsi a week earlier, demanding that then Prime Minister Khalid al-Azm, resign and let Salah al-Bitar form a new government.78 There had been four cabinets in the seventeen months since the split from Egypt and Hariri and others were angry over the growing isolation of Syria from the revolutionary Arab states. This feeling had intensified among pan-Arab supporters since the coup in Iraq had opened up talks between Cairo and Baghdad.79 Salah al-Bitar, along with Michel Aflaq, both schoolteachers from Damascus, had been founders of the Baath party in the late 1940s.

It quickly developed that the major goals of the new government would be unification along some kind of a federal system. It declared that breakup of the U.A.R. eighteen months before had been a tragedy and an act of betrayal. While it was unclear exactly how much sovereignty it was willing to sacrifice, the new government called for union with not only Egypt and Iraq, but also Algeria and the new revolutionary regime in Yemen.80 While there was no immediate danger to U.S.-Syrian relations, analysts predicted that calls for unity would create a “contest...for dominance” in Syria between

76 Brubeck to Bundy, February 27, 1963; and Syrian President Qudsi to Kennedy, February 19, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
77 Moore (acting in Knights absence) to Rusk, March 8, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
78 Moore to Rusk, March 11, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
79 Interim Policy Guide-Department of State, March, 29, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
80 Telegram: US Army to Rusk, March 8, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
Renewed pan-Arabism also would threaten royalist regimes such as those of Jordan and Saudi Arabia, and make Israel more insecure. These countries would then likely look to the United States for more assurances and assistance.82

Although a peaceful coup, the events in Syria would persuade American policymakers that a resolution to the crisis in Yemen was even more important than before. Kennedy continued trying to encourage moderate reform through grants and loans. Rusk even saw Arab nationalism as an effective tool against communism:

The best present defense against communism in the Middle East is Arab Nationalism. The most effective ways in which the U.S. can combat communism in the Middle East are to encourage a rational and orderly approach by the Arab nationalists toward their legitimate goals and to avoid gloating over the defeat suffered by the communists.83

Because of this belief and the recognition that the Syrians felt compelled to maintain a large military force, Rusk recommended that Kennedy sell more weapons to Syria. This would help counteract the amount of weapons Syria was currently purchasing from the Soviet Union.

Then on April 17, 1963, Egypt, Syria and Iraq issued a joint statement declaring their support of eventual union of the three states.84 All agreed to a federal system in which a federal president and parliament would control all major foreign, military and economic relationships. Each country would retain autonomy over some local issues and each would have representation as vice presidents. The only real point of disagreement was the timetable. Rusk was not overly concerned by the developments, probably because he expected the three countries to have significant trouble ironing out their differences. While intentions were strong, the practicalities of unity might very well take a long time and distract any such union from threatening either Israel or the royalist regimes. In some

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81 Hilsman to Rusk, March 8, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
82 Phillips Talbot to Middle East Embassies, White House Staff, and National Security Council, March 9, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
83 Interim Policy Guide-Department of State, March 29, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
84 Rusk to Middle East Embassies, April 19, 1963, FRUS, 18:473-477.
ways, Kennedy and his administration were moderating their view of nationalist
movements in the Middle East. In Iran, the U.S. viewed nationalism as dangerous to
American interests. In Syria and Iraq, however, nationalist revolutions seemed to be
effective deterrents to communism. In Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, revolutionary nationalist
movements were tolerable as long as they were anti-communist, and willing to maintain a
good relationship with the West.

During a press conference on May 8, 1963, Kennedy issued a statement on
American policy toward the Middle East. He reaffirmed his support for Israel, as well as
for Jordan and other Arab countries and vowed to limit the arms race and maintain peace
with or without United Nations assistance.85 This statement sparked an outburst of anti-
American sentiment in Syria, as Prime Minister Bitar interpreted the statement as
imperialistic.86 He accused Kennedy of trying to maintain Israeli superiority by talking
about limiting an arms race in the region. The tone of Bitar’s statement was very
antagonistic, carrying a continuing suspicion of American motives, no matter how
evenhanded Kennedy had tried to be.

Syrian anger at Kennedy was quickly eclipsed by renewed incidents along the
Israeli-Syrian border on July 11 and again on August 20.87 Israel accused the Syrians of
killing two Israelis and both countries requested the help of the UN Security Council. The
U.S. became upset when Iraq offered to give military assistance to Syria if needed.
Kennedy believed such statements would only serve to inflame the situation.88 In the end,
the U.S. and the UNTSO held the Syrians largely responsible for the incidents. Komer
argued that Baath leadership inside Syria had probably incited the clashes in order to
unify its own populace and undermine Nasserists. In light of a similar incident the
previous year when Israel had been heavily censured by the U.S., Komer now

85 Editorial Note, FRUS, 18:516.
86 Moore to Rusk, May 18, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
87 Knight to Rusk, July 18, 1963; Stevenson to Rusk, August 21, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
88 Ball to Middle East Embassies, August 21, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
recommended that Syria be severely censured” in order to forestall an Israel reprisal. Kennedy agreed as a way of showing his evenhanded approach to all sides.89

As incidents along the Israeli-Syrian border decreased, renewed attention to Arab unity threatened Jordan. Both Syrian and Iraqi Baathists were encouraging Baathist unrest in Jordan and the U.S. made a strong statement in response. Kennedy believed Jordan was not only a valuable Western ally, but also an important buffer between more radical Arab regimes and Israel.90 The Syrians, however, saw this support for Jordan as "imperialist threats (that will) only increase Arab determination to achieve [the] goal of erasing imperialist influence by toppling reactionary regimes and cleansing Palestine of invaders.”91

This belligerent statement to the contrary, Syrian friendship with the U.S., while strained, continued for the rest of Kennedy's administration. The politics of Syria remained highly unstable with frequent changes of prime ministers and cabinets.92 Conflicts between the Baath party and Nasser also delayed any plans for unity with Egypt and Iraq. While pan-Arab nationalism appeared to be a moving force in Middle East politics in the early 1960s, inter-Arab conflicts prevented any real union of Arab states. Kennedy had been afraid of such dominos of Arab nationalism and the implications they might have on pro-Western, royalist regimes as well as the long-term security for Israel.

Crisis in Jordan

Although union between Egypt, Iraq, and Syria had not materialized, these plans and their precipitant revolutions increased instability inside one of the traditional regimes, Jordan. Upset by American support for Nasser and its recognition of the revolutionary

89 Komer to Kennedy, August 22, 1963, FRUS, 18: 681; and Rusk to US UN Delegation, August 27, 1963, FRUS, 18:693.
90 Rusk to Knight, October 19, 1963, FRUS, 18:748-749.
91 Knight to Rusk, October 31, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
92 Knight to Rusk, November 13, 1963, NSF Box 162, JFKL.
government in Yemen, Jordanian rhetoric toward the U.S. became somewhat hostile. In early 1963, King Hussein warned Kennedy that his policies were "likely to lead in the future to the shattering of Middle East stability." Political pressure inside Jordan was building and Hussein faced criticism from all sides. His previous support for the Johnson Refugee Plan had caused unrest among the Palestinian population who feared Hussein was abandoning their claims to the West Bank. The HAWK missile sale to Israel also caused Hussein’s critics to ask why he had not managed such a deal with the United States. These issues, combined with events in Yemen, threatened the stability of Jordan and Hussein blamed Kennedy for it.

As pro-Nasser demonstrations broke out in the West Bank in response to the coups in Iraq and Syria, Hussein declared martial law and tightened his control of the country. In March, riots erupted in various locations throughout Jordan and Israel became nervous. It devised a plan to seize the West Bank (called Plan Granite) if Hussein lost control of his country. This action concerned Kennedy, who quickly dispatched diplomats to Israel to urge caution. He did the same with Nasser, whom he feared might take advantage of Hussein’s troubles. To counter any Israeli or Egyptian actions, Kennedy sent the Sixth Fleet to the Mediterranean in case Hussein needed U.S. troops to restore order.

In the end, Hussein managed to control his country without outside help by rigging elections (nothing new in Jordan) in September 1963 to obtain a tame parliament. In spite of continuing strong support to Jordan from the Kennedy Administration, Congress began to question the amount of American support it granted to Hussein. During 1962, U.S. aid to Jordan had exceeded $60 million, but by the end of

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93 Macomber to Rusk, January 4, 1963, NSF Box 125, JFKL.
94 Uriel Dann, Hussein, 132-133.
95 Read to Bundy, May 1963, NSF Box 119. JFKL.
96 Roland Dallas, A Life on the Edge, 98.
1963, Congress slashed this aid by twelve percent. It became clear that Kennedy's commitment to Hussein did not reflect the general American sentiment and after Kennedy's assassination, the King felt even more isolated and without support.

OPEC

Although the world's major oil-producing countries created OPEC (Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries) in 1960, Kennedy's administration did not seriously address the subject until 1963. Some sources show that Robert Kennedy and the Justice Department worked to grant American oil companies exemption from anti-trust laws so they could collectively bargain with OPEC. There is no record, however, of any other direct action. The most that was done, apparently, was to hold discussions with Britain and with oil company executives. The first such meeting was a meeting with the British in July, 1963. In this meeting, both sides agreed to coordinate their policies toward OPEC, to share information, and to avoid a "stance of hostility" toward the organization.

The administration held no other discussions on this subject until November, 1963. In a memo on November 18, Talbot voiced his concerns about American policy toward Arab states and mostly discussed Yemen and the impact of intra-Arab conflict. At the very end of his memo, he mentioned OPEC as a future problem and that the U.S. was recently facing "the most intensive pressures from OPEC for major contractual revisions" than ever before. While he gave no further explanation, one can assume that the problem had to do with OPEC pressures to cut production and raise the price of crude oil. At this time, the market was flooded by high oil production in the Middle East and an influx of cheap oil from the Soviet Union. If OPEC was going to work, it had to force oil

97 Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?" 529-531.
companies to decrease production. Countries such as Saudi Arabia were also hoping to renegotiate concession agreements for larger profit-shares and even outright ownership of the concessions themselves. Iran had nationalized its oil concessions and Enrico Mattei of Italy had negotiated a 75/25 concession in 1957, giving Iran the larger share. This action broke the 50/50 share tradition and inspired other countries to seek similar arrangements. Perhaps this factor was the motivating force behind pressures from OPEC in 1963.

Still, the U.S. did not seriously discuss OPEC among its policy-making bodies until after Kennedy's death. On December 6, 1963, a meeting occurred between American oil executives and the State Department. In this meeting, the participants discussed recent OPEC attempts to increase the profit-share of oil. U.S. companies in Saudi Arabia and Iran had made offers to increase countries' share from 50 to 58 percent, but both the Saudis and Iran found it unacceptable. The two countries planned to obtain sanctions against the oil companies at an upcoming OPEC meeting. The oil executives asked the State Department to make sure the Shah and Faisal clearly understood the terms they were offering. Talbot agreed to do this.

In a memo to Acting Secretary of State George Ball on December 16, Talbot recommended that the U.S. government continue talking to both the oil companies and the host countries. He believed that the Shah felt the stance of OPEC too extreme and gave encouraging indications to the American Ambassador that he would seek to modify its demands at next meeting. Talbot recommended that they put pressure on the oil companies to compromise with OPEC. He also urged that the U.S. share any plans with Britain.

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100 Yergin, The Prize, 502-3.
101 It is possible there were other discussions regarding OPEC in the oval office or the NSC, but these documents, if they exist, are either not in the national security files or remain closed to researchers.
102 Memorandum of Conversation: Discussion of Near East Developments and OPEC, December 6, 1963, FRUS, 18: 826-831.
103 Talbot to Ball, December 16, 1963, FRUS, 18: 841-843.
The problem with OPEC in the 1960s was that inter-member conflicts prevented effective, collective action. It was already evident in late 1963 that Iran would not cooperate with the effort to cut production. The Shah wanted more oil revenues, not less, and continued to believe that Arab oil producers were getting favorable treatment from American oil companies, at his expense. This attitude and his rivalry with Saudi Arabia prevented OPEC from enforcing its policies until the 1970s.\textsuperscript{104}

Nasser continued his involvement in Yemen as the United States watched with apprehension. Although Kennedy had started his administration determined to maintain a balance between Arab and Israeli interests, the scale was now tipping toward Israel. Once Kennedy tried to use HAWKS to gain Israeli cooperation with the Dimona nuclear plan and refugees, Arab states questioned Kennedy's intention. As coups occurred in Iraq and Syria (and nearly in Jordan), American policy makers questioned support for such regimes. Nasser's continued involvement in Yemen also made rapprochement seem like a failure as well. New worries over OPEC created challenges in balancing approaches to Iran and Saudi Arabia. Yet, Kennedy would continue to try to influence events in the region by using American aid as a carrot for reforms and cooperation with the West.

\textsuperscript{104} Yergin, \textit{The Prize}, 524,523-535.
By 1963, Kennedy found all his initiatives in the Middle East in serious trouble, the plan for the Arab refugees all but dead and strains increased in his relationship with Nasser. Most of the reason for failure centered on the continuing clash between Arab states in Yemen. Kennedy eventually would have to choose between his new friend, Nasser, and an older ally, Saudi Arabia.

The Yemeni War Continues

The beginning of 1963 revealed further deterioration of the situation in Yemen as neither the Saudis nor Nasser backed down from their positions. Kennedy's recognition of the revolutionary regime in December had done nothing to ease the stress between Nasser and Faisal. In January, Nasser renewed bombing raids inside the Saudi border in order to discourage Faisal from supplying the royalists.1 The Saudis had increased their cross-border activity before the January bombings and made no real effort to disengage from Yemen. Egypt began bombing al-Badr's camps just inside the Saudi border and in January 1963, Egyptian air attacks reached as deep as Najran. American press reports began to speak of Nasser's double-dealing with Kennedy.2

Toward the end of January, the President received a lengthy, hand-written letter from Prince Abdallah al-Hosein, commander of the loyalist armies, begging Kennedy to send a mission to Yemen.3 He guaranteed such a mission completely safe transportation and accommodations. While previous communications blamed Egypt for the coup, al-Hosein also blamed Russia and China. He argued that young army officers, "indoctrinated

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1 Rusk to Badeau, January 4, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
2 Komer to Kennedy, January 21, 1963, Staff Memoranda-Komer, Box 322, JFKL.
3 Prince Abdallah al-Hosein to Kennedy, January 20, 1963, WHC F, Box 75, JFKL.
with Nasserism," had been responsible for the coup d'état, which was emphatically not a revolution. He claimed that students had been forced to demonstrate in support of the new government and that the rebels were supported only by "a small number of disgruntled tribal sub-chiefs." The prince complained that while the world allowed Egypt to invade Yemen, it was preventing his royalists from receiving any support from non-communist friends. Egyptian military forces had taken action against civilians. How, he asked, could the United States let such aggression go unanswered?

Recognizing the importance of American and European access to Saudi oil, the State and Defense Departments argued about the kind of gesture that could be made to Faisal without jeopardizing the relationship with Nasser. Eventually, the State Department and Joint Chiefs of Staff agreed to send a token deployment of U.S. warplanes to Saudi Arabia. Hopefully, this move would keep Nasser from attacking the Saudis and serve as leverage to persuade Faisal to stop his involvement in Yemen. Kennedy decided to send Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker to urge Saudi disengagement from the war. He also offered to send an American air squadron "to deter U.A.R. air operations" as a reward for his cooperation. Once the Saudis had agreed to this arrangement, Kennedy would pressure Nasser to withdraw. The National Security Council and State Department had recently drafted a plan for the Yemen conflict that identified several objectives. First, the United States could not forcibly remove the Egyptians from Yemen. Nasser needed to leave at his own volition. Second, the U.S. needed to make sure than any action did not invite the Soviets into Yemen. Third, American friendship must be maintained with both the U.A.R. and Saudi Arabia. Bunker's task would be difficult.

To further complicate matters, the U.S. and Britain continued to disagree on the crisis in Yemen. On February 14, Kennedy received a letter from British Prime Minister

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4 Ibid.
5 Bundy to Taylor, January 11, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL; and National Security Action Memorandum # 227, February 27, 1963, Presidential Office Files, Box 123b, JFKL.
6 Memorandum by Bundy to Rusk and McNamara, February 27, 1963, NSF Box 340, JFKL.
7 Policy Review of the Yemen Conflict, no date, NSF box 340, JFKL.
Harold MacMillan in which he explained why Britain had not recognized the republican regime in that state. Britain had just recently established a federal government in Aden as a step in preparing the state for independence. Recognizing a revolutionary government so close to Aden might jeopardize British goals.8

In March, Talbot submitted a status report to the NSC on American efforts to end the Yemen conflict. He informed the Council that Bunker had talked to Faisal and found him to be generally in agreement with American objectives and the proposal for Saudi withdrawal.9 Dr. Ralph J. Bunche, United Nations Under-Secretary, met with Nasser and presented similar plans for disengagement. Both sides were willing to cooperate as long as sufficient assurances for withdrawal were forthcoming from the other side. Talbot urged Kennedy to send Bunche immediately to Saudi Arabia to broker a deal with Faisal and offer the U.S. air squadron if they reached an agreement. In order to comply with American wishes, Faisal also made it clear in a speech at a public rally near the Yemeni border that he was not blindly supporting the Imam.10

Unfortunately, however, Faisal demanded too many conditions for disengagement for Nasser to accept. Not only did he want assurance that Nasser would pull out of Yemen simultaneous with his suspension of aid, he also wanted Egyptian forces to suspend activities and move out of Yemen.11 This kind of an agreement with Egypt was not likely to happen and Nasser argued that "Saudi gun-running" justified his actions, including the bombing of Saudi territory.12 He did, however, agree to let the negotiations of Bunker and Bunche have a few weeks to work before he resumed bombing.

At this point, Kennedy sought the support of Britain for mediation efforts over the Yemeni conflict. On March 8, at the advice of Komer, Kennedy wrote Macmillan, asking for British recognition of the Yemeni government, in order to further disengagement by

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8 Harold Macmillan to Kennedy, NSF Box 340, JFKL.
9 Talbot to Rusk and NSC, March 11, 1963, NSF Box 340, JFKL.
10 Homer to Rusk, March 7, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
11 Homer to Rusk, March 8, 1963, POF Box 123b, JFKL.
12 Komer to Kennedy, March 5, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
Nasser and Faisal. Macmillan refused, arguing that Nasser would use Sallal's regime in Yemen to launch revolutions in Aden, Saudi Arabia, and even Jordan. To make matters worse, a *New York Times* article on March 9 asserted that Kennedy had forced Nasser to suspend bombings "in response to a stern United States warning." Kommer worried that this story would provoke bombings from Nasser to prove he was not susceptible to American pressure. Kommer urged Bundy to have Kennedy send a private message via Badeau apologizing for the story. He never sent such a message for soon afterward, Nasser did bomb two Saudi towns. Kommer reported on this event to Kennedy, handwriting in the margins "I was right after all, and Badeau should have delivered that private message." Kommer argued that both Nasser and the Saudis were trying to force the United States to support their side in the conflict. In the aftermath of this public relations fiasco, Kommer also urged Kennedy to tell Faisal that if he would quietly agree to suspend shipments of arms to Yemen, the U.S. would dispatch the previously discussed air squadron immediately, thus sending a message to Nasser that America stood behind its allies. This action, argued Kommer, would probably go further to persuade Nasser to disengage than any more dialogue.

As Bunker and Bunche continued negotiations, both the U.A.R. and the Saudis responded positively. Nasser feared, however, that Kennedy was turning toward Israel and a recent visit to the U.S. by Israeli defense minister Shimon Peres only exacerbated such worries. In mid April, Kommer visited Cairo to talk to Nasser about Yemen and other issues in order to calm his fears. It seemed that the Bunker-Bunche negotiations between all sides was taking effect. Satisfied with these developments, Kommer hoped the war in

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13 Kommer to Kennedy, March 8, 1963, Staff Memoranda-Komer, Box 322 and Kennedy to Macmillan, March 8, 1964, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
15 Kommer to Kennedy, March 13, 1963, Staff Memoranda-Komer, Box 322, JFKL.
16 Kommer to Kennedy, March 11, 1963, NSF Box 340, JFKL.
Yemen was all but over, and he believed that the promise to send airplanes to the Saudis had done the deed.17

**Operation Hard Surface**

Unfortunately, appearances of a "balanced approach" to the Middle East further deteriorated with the plan to send military support to the Saudis. It was called "Operation Hard Surface" and would consist of posting approximately eight F-101s and six K-50 planes with radar equipment and appropriate personnel as a training exercise. Since both Faisal and Nasser were willing to cooperate on withdrawal from Yemen, the State Department hoped the squadron's arrival, while not an open threat to Nasser, would have the effect of one.18 The U.S. also established strict "Rules of Engagement" to keep potential conflict at a minimum. Although the Saudis would assume this deployment would have considerable freedom of action, Kennedy wanted to make sure that American planes did not shoot at anyone, particularly the Egyptians.19

The squadron's freedom of action would not be the only problem. Faisal insisted that Kennedy post the bulk of the deployment at Jidda, while the U.S. wanted most of the planes and personnel at the larger airfield in Dhahran.20 Delay in deployment of a United Nations observer team in Yemen created other problems. Kennedy wanted the personnel in place before Operation Hard Surface commenced, so it would look much more like the training exercise he was calling it. The Soviets, however, delayed the decision in the Security Council.21 Hope that both Faisal and Nasser would quickly disengage was too optimistic.

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17 Brubeck to Bundy, April 6, 1963; and Memorandum of Conversation with Nasser: to Rusk, April 19, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
18 Anshuetz (Paris) to Rusk, March 15; Rusk to Horner, April 1963; and Rusk to Horner, April 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
19 Air Force Rules of Engagement for Operation Hard Surface, April 1963; and Komer to Kennedy, June 13, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
20 Homer to Rusk, May 14, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
21 Kaysen and Komer to Kennedy, June 8, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
To make matters worse, news leaked out that Saudi Arabia had required the screening of American personnel sent over for Operation Hard Surface. The Saudis in the past had created trouble by refusing to issue visas to Jewish-Americans. Now, this point of contention came up again. Although the Saudis had backed down and agreed to allow any Americans in, word did not pass through the channels in time for the selection of Jewish-Americans for the mission, a fact that produced criticism in the United States.22

Before deployment of either the UN observers or the U.S. air squadron could occur, Nasser resumed bombing Saudi targets across the border. Faisal became extremely frustrated at the American delay and although he had not retaliated, felt he would soon have to do so. He sent desperate messages to Kennedy, who sought to reassure the crown prince that the squadron was ready to go as soon as the UN observers were on the ground. Nasser continued to bomb Saudi targets and Kennedy worried that the American deployment would have no effect, thus exposing the impotence of the United States.23 His tightrope required a show of force, but not use of it. Once this fact became apparent to the Saudis, American prestige in the region began to diminish. Parker T. Hart recommended that either the U.S. inform the Saudis of limitations placed on the air squadron, or that plans be made to adjust the rules of engagement, should Nasser continue bombing.

Meanwhile, Badeau confronted Nasser with a rumor that he was using poison gas against royalists in Yemen. Nasser denied the charge at first, but then conceded that his army was using some kind of a chemical bomb, although he did not know precisely what it was. Badeau replied that the U.S. was opposed to such weapons and complained that the U.A.R. was not disengaging as promised. Nasser accused Faisal of secretly continuing arms shipments to the royalists, that the Saudi government was guilty of acting "in bad faith." 24 As it turned out, Nasser's information was accurate.

22 Series of Memos and Telegrams, May through July 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
23 Rusk to Kennedy, June 12, 1963; and Hart to Rusk, June 28, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
24 Badeau to Rusk, July 11, 1963, NSF Box 157, JFKL.
Although the United States was concerned about the poison gas issue, Komer recommended not pushing Nasser too hard or publicizing it. Kennedy believed it would be better to let the United Nations or Great Britain lead any criticism of Nasser's activities in Yemen. Although disengagement was still not complete, Komer argued that Egyptian-American relations were better than ever and that any criticism now would jeopardize them. Again, American policy remained reactive toward Nasser in an effort to preserve the "relationship." Komer thought it would be better to remain silent than to push Nasser on the issue. The problem was that press stories about the poison gas, combined with Nasser's recent belligerence toward Israel and his missile research was beginning to generate heavy criticism of American support for Egypt.

Congress was also upset that in spite of Saudi disengagement from Yemen before Operation Hard Surface, Nasser was not withdrawing his troops as promised. Finally, on July 29, Nasser informed the U.S. that he would begin withdrawal in early August. He insisted that he was doing this to demonstrate his friendship with Kennedy, since he believed that Saudi forces were still operating inside Yemen. In fact, by the end of July, intelligence reports indicated that Nasser had already withdrawn 1,500 troops. The conflict was not over, however, and the Saudis and Egyptians continued to accuse each other of shelling and bombing. The U.S. confirmed that U.A.R. forces did indeed bomb Saudi territory on July 31 and August 12, 1963, despite Nasser's claims to the contrary.

After a summer of tension, both Nasser and Faisal began to bend to American pressure for direct negotiations over Yemen. One of the sticking points with the Saudis, however, was the continuing barrage of negative propaganda about the royal family. The State Department began pressing Nasser and Faisal for a one-month hiatus on propaganda and for support for the UN observers in Yemen (UNYOM). Observers had arrived in

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25 Komer to Bundy, July 15, and July 17, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
26 Komer to Kennedy, July 18, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
27 Rusk to Area Embassies, July 19, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
28 Komer to Kennedy, July 31; Badeau to Rusk, August 5; and Ball to Area Embassies, August 22, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
Yemen in June to ensure that Nasser and Faisal disengaged. The Saudis, however, were still smuggling arms and money to the royalist tribes, which simply fueled Nasser's propaganda warfare.29

Meanwhile, both countries felt the costs of engagement in Yemen. The U.A.R. was spending the most and needed additional American assistance by late September 1963 to meet its loan obligations.30 Neither Kennedy nor Congress was prepared to provide additional money to Nasser as long as his troops remained in Yemen. Nasser's preoccupation with Yemen meant that Egypt delayed internal reforms that American aid was supposed to encourage. The State Department also complained that Nasser was propping up a government in Yemen that did not represent all sections of its society. Rusk and his team encouraged Nasser to press the Yemeni government to institute reforms that would increase its stability and fiscal status.31

By October 1963, both the National Security Council and State Department were urging stronger efforts to pressure both Egypt and Saudi Arabia to disengage from the Yemeni Civil War. Badeau relayed Nasser's suggestion that the U.S. provide economic assistance to Yemen that would enable the U.A.R. to withdraw. Kennedy continued to believe that the best course of action was to pressure both sides to pull out and use the UNYOM as a buffer between the two.32 Komer was worried about the possible withdrawal of UNYOM and stated:

Risk sequence I fear is: (a) UNYOM withdraws; (2) Saudis can't resist gun-running again; (3) UAR resumed bombing of supply routes; (4) Saudis scream for us to protect them with our squadron; and (5) we're torn between looking like "paper tigers" or risking US/UAR air clash.33

29 Boswell (diplomat in Cairo Embassy) to Rusk, August 31, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
30 Ball to Area Embassies, September 25, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
31 Badeau to Rusk, October 8, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
32 Badeau to Rusk, October 8, 1963, NSF Box 169; and NSC Memo by Bundy. October 10, 1963, NSF Box 342, JFKL.
33 Komer to Bundy, October 10, 1963, NSF Box 342, JFKL.
Komer suggested that the U.S. keep the eight jets in Saudi Arabia for a while, but threaten the Saudis to cooperate or lose American protection. Rusk asked Badeau to again pressure Nasser to end his propaganda against the Saudis, so the State Department could use this concession to force the Saudis to open a direct dialogue with Egypt. Kennedy felt Faisal owed him that, after all the U.S. had done through Operation Hard Surface to ensure his stability. He then sent a personal message to Nasser, his last, voicing "concern over the U.A.R.'s failure to date to carry out its part of the Yemen disengagement agreement." The problem was that the mission of the UNYOM was to run out on November 4 unless it was renewed. Kennedy's advisors feared that once these observers left, war would be inevitable.

Nasser responded that he would withdraw 6,000 troops by November 4, but argued that unless he kept some forces in Yemen, Sallal's government might fall prey to several warring factions. Further American pressure induced him to promise withdrawal of an additional 5,000 by January 1964. Pressure on the Saudis, however, was not as effective and in the face of ongoing refusal of either side to make serious concessions, UN Secretary General U Thant announced the withdrawal of UNYOM. The U.S. then threatened to withdraw the air squadron from Saudi Arabia if it did not continue to finance the UNYOM, and the Saudis agreed, convincing U. Thant to reverse his decision. Kennedy's threats to cut off aid to Nasser were not as effective and the latter stated that he had done without American aid in the past and could do so again if necessary. There would be no end to the Yemeni conflict for almost another four years, and other complications would make the U.S.-U.A.R. relationship even more tenuous. In fact,

34 Komer to Kennedy, October 7, 1963, NSF Box 342; Rusk to Badeau and Hart, October 11, 1963, NSF Box 169; and Kennedy to Nasser, October 19, 1963, NSF Box 169. JFKL.
35 Badeau to Rusk, October 27, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
36 Komer to Bundy, November 12, 1963 and Newsweek article on Yemen, November 11, 1963, in NSF Box 169, JFKL.
Egyptian forces would still be tied down in Yemen in June 1967, giving Israel the opportunity to seize the West Bank.

A Middle East Arms Race

While the on-going conflict in Yemen pitted traditional and revolutionary Arab regimes against each other, it would not be the only issue to cause Kennedy to re-evaluate his relationship with Egypt. The development of a Middle East arms race, the very problem Kennedy hoped to prevent, began in the wake of the sale of HAWK missiles to Israel in 1962. The earliest signs of this problem developed in early 1963 when Egypt requested HAWK missiles for itself. Kennedy informed Nasser of the sale to Israel the previous summer and promised that such weapons would also be available to Arab countries if they met security requirements. The presence of Soviet military advisors in Egypt, however, posed a security problem.

Although the State Department was able to deflect Egyptian interest at that point, Kennedy began a serious re-evaluation of the relationship with Egypt. Angry at Nasser's lingering intervention in Yemen, Congress began demanding justification for American aid to Nasser. Studies in the State Department and National Security Council produced a lengthy report on May 8, 1963, in which William Brubeck argued that American interests in the Middle East continued to be to "limit Soviet influence and prevent Soviet domination" as well as guaranteeing Western access to oil, and the security of Israel. (These three objectives remained the same from the 1950s until 1991). He stated that American aid to Egypt served these aims by taking away the need for Soviet assistance and increasing Western technology and cultural influence there.

37 Rusk to Badeau, January 31, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
38 Brubeck to Bundy, May 8, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
One of the major arguments in Congress against continued aid for Nasser was that he might use such support in an arms race against Israel and traditional Arab regimes such as Saudi Arabia and Jordan. Brubeck argued that withdrawing aid from Egypt would not lessen the threat to Israel or other Arab regimes, but would only serve to increase Soviet influence. In other words, while American aid might not be creating the kind of leverage over Nasser's actions that Congress desired, removing it would help the Soviets and lessen the chances to influence Nasser in the long-term. He also argued that the proposed Arab Federation, announced in Cairo on April 17, would not pose a serious threat to Israel since the armies of member countries were far away from each other.39

The major point of Congressional criticism was that Nasser was using American aid to fight in Yemen. Brubeck argued, however, that Nasser was using Soviet supplies in Yemen, not American. He urged aid to Egypt be continued in order to gradually draw Nasser closer to the West. He reported that during the years 1949 to 1962, the United States gave Israel approximately $411 million dollars in grants and loans, compared to only $26 million for the U.A.R. If Kennedy had sought a balanced approach, he had certainly never reached it in aid levels to the region. About a week later, Thomas Hughes of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research reported that the recent sale of HAWK missiles to Israel could push Nasser closer to the Soviets.40 In light of this report, the State Department continued to support generous American aid to Egypt.

Kennedy was also troubled over Nasser's recent speeches for Arab unity that spoke of the "liberation of Palestine."41 Growing pan-Arab rhetoric in Iraq and Syria began to encourage Nasser to make bellicose statements toward Israel, in effect bringing the subject "out of the icebox," focusing particularly on Israel's nuclear project at Dimona. News of West German scientists in Egypt also caused American concern that

39 Ibid.
40 Intelligence Report by Thomas L. Hughes to Rusk, May 16, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
41 Badeau to Rusk, April 30, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
Nasser was working toward developing missile capability. Nasser argued that his actions were defensive moves necessitated by Israeli nuclear research development. Since Kennedy had sold HAWK missiles to Israel, Nasser felt he must go to surface-to-surface missiles in order to have a deterrent capability.

Nasser also argued that recent instability in Jordan and Saudi Arabia was a result of bad, internal policy, not outside pressure and that Israel was simply stirring up the world press in order to procure more money and assurances from the United States:

If the United States sees Israel's arms superiority, why does she sell her additional quantities, as has been the case recently when the United States equipped Israel with "hawk" missiles? If this is the case and Israeli aggressive intentions have been confirmed by experience, one occasion after the other, it is not the right of the Arab side to amend its position and be ready to face the worst?

While Nasser had taken the sale of HAWKS to Israel in stride, he obviously thought it justified further weapons development and procurement on his part. He did agree, however, to receive an American representative to further discuss the arms issue, if Kennedy so desired.

Komer earlier had suggested talks between Israel and Egypt, arguing that Kennedy could address the Israeli request for a security guarantee in the process. If Nasser agreed to an arms limitation treaty, the U.S. could argue that a security guarantee was necessary to obtain Ben-Gurion's cooperation. If Nasser did not sign, Kennedy could say that a security guarantee was necessary to protect Israel. Either way, the U.S. could give assurances to Israel, a policy Komer supported.

Although the primary item in Kennedy’s Middle East policy was a refugee settlement, Israel’s Dimona Nuclear project remained a significant issue. In fact, it was by 1963 probably the most important issue Kennedy had with Israel. Although Ben-Gurion had made promises for regular visits to the plant, only one had occurred and Kennedy was

42 Kennedy to Nasser, May 27, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
43 Nasser to Kennedy, June 7, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
44 Ibid.
45 Komer to Kennedy, May 31, 1963, NSF Box 168a, JFKL.
frustrated at Israel’s delaying tactics for future inspections. American scientists believed that inspection every six months was necessary to affirm the supposedly peaceful purposes of the plant. Since Kennedy in the wake of the Cuban Missile Crisis was committed to non-proliferation of nuclear weapons globally and test limitations, the status of Israel’s project took on added significance. Ben-Gurion wanted security guarantees from the United States and Kennedy wanted to avoid an arms race, and the two increasingly became incompatible.

Although former Israeli diplomat Mordechai Gazit has argued that there was no linkage between Israel’s desire for security guarantees and Kennedy’s interest in the Dimona plant, historian Avner Cohen disagreed.⁴⁶ Cohen argued that although specific linkage was not mentioned, a willingness to begin coordinated security talks occurred only after the new Israeli Prime Minister Levi Eshkol agreed to schedule regular visits of the Dimona plant.⁴⁷ Eshkol carefully avoided specific promises and continued to be less than honest with the United States regarding the nuclear plant’s true purpose, but he agreed that Kennedy had a right to be interested, a view much unlike Golda Meir’s who thought it a violation of Israeli sovereignty.

In June 1963, Kennedy and his advisors agreed to send John J. McCloy, coordinator of U.S. disarmament activities, as a special emissary to open discussions with Egypt and Israel. Komer again suggested using a possible security guarantee as bait for Israeli cooperation on an arms limitation agreement, much as Kennedy had used the HAWK missiles to try to gain cooperation of the Johnson Refugee Plan. Cohen argued that concern over the Dimona Project was also a major reason for the McCloy Mission. Rusk scheduled the visit to Cairo for late June and Israel in mid July.⁴⁸ Komer advised McCloy before his departure that an arms limitation agreement between Israel and Egypt

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⁴⁸ Komer to Kennedy, June 14, 1963; and Talbot to Barbour, May 29, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.

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might be the only way to prevent Israel from developing nuclear weapons in the near future.49

McCloy met with Nasser on June 29 and 30, and reported to Rusk that in spite of hopes to the contrary, Nasser would not sign an agreement to renounce nuclear weapons because to do so would infringe upon Egyptian sovereignty. He said he "had no intention of developing nuclear weaponry," but would agree only to renounce nuclear proliferation if it were a broader declaration by many countries, perhaps sponsored by the United Nations. Neither would he agree to inspections.50 Nasser did agree, however, to write Kennedy a letter stating that he had no intention to develop nuclear weapons or attack Israel and that the U.S. could publish it.

When McCloy asked what Nasser would do if he discovered Israel was using the Dimona nuclear plant to produce weapons, he answered, "Protective war. We would have no other choice."51 He also mentioned that while the United States had concluded a large loan to Israel for the purchase of HAWK missiles, recent pressure on West Germany had resulted in a vote in the Bundestag against assisting foreign countries in the development of weapons. Nasser stated that he would grant citizenship to the West German scientists currently in Egypt if necessary. He also revealed his suspicion that Kennedy wanted a non-proliferation agreement now because of the recent Israeli propaganda campaign.

While Nasser did not agree to a ban on nuclear development and McCloy consequently postponed his visit to Israel, the discussion had been very open and frank. Badeau and Komer saw this as evidence that the relationship with Egypt continued to develop along positive lines.52 Komer argued that Kennedy should continue to pressure Nasser toward an agreement on nuclear arms, as he thought this would be the only way to

49 Komer to McCloy, June 19, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
50 McCloy to Rusk, June 30, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
51 Ibid.
52 Badeau to Rusk, July 1, 1963 and Komer to Kennedy, July 3, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
force Israel to give up its own suspected program of nuclear weapons development. He argued:

Our dilemma is that the more we talk about inspection, nuclear self-denial, and Jordan the more the Israelis will see leverage to get guarantee, arms, and joint planning from us.\(^5\)

Komer thought that a security guarantee might be a small price to pay for an Israeli agreement to inspections of the Dimona Plant and a promise to not interfere with Jordan. Rusk agreed with this assessment. Although Kennedy never gave a formal security guarantee, it is perhaps significant that he began talks on the subject with Israel in November 1963 after Eshkol agreed to regular inspection of the Dimona Plant.\(^5\) Ben-Gurion and Eshkol wanted more, but both were willing to make concessions on their nuclear plant and mislead the United States in order to gain a closer relationship. They succeeded. Israel managed to use American concern about nuclear proliferation to draw a stronger American commitment to their security.

The Gruening Amendment

Meanwhile, Kennedy continued to discuss arms limitations and nuclear power regulations with Nasser, gently prodding him toward some kind of an agreement. The two countries also began discussing joint space research.\(^5\) Kennedy was troubled with Nasser's ongoing involvement in Yemen and the pressure this policy produced from Saudi Arabia and Great Britain. Burdened by his costly intervention in Yemen, Nasser asked the United States in November 1963 for an additional $10 million in loans to cover debt payments. The administration knew that asking Congress for more money for Egypt was out of the question and Talbot informed the Egyptian Minister of the Treasury Kaissouni that unless Egypt disengaged from Yemen, the United States could not justify

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\(^5\) Komer to Kennedy, July 3 and 23, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
\(^5\) Rusk to Kennedy, September 10, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL; and Cohen, “Israel’s Nuclear History,” 191-192.
\(^5\) Rusk to Badeau and Boswell to Rusk, September 12, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
further aid. Kennedy felt increasingly torn between his goals for cooperation with Arab nationalism and pressure from oil-producing Saudi Arabia.56

Then came a surprise from Congress in the form of the Gruening-Farbstein Amendment, passed on November 7, 1963. Essentially, this amendment to the Foreign Assistance Act forbade American aid, including PL 480 sales, to countries that were "engaging in, or preparing for, aggressive military efforts against another country which is an aid recipient." Angry that the U.S. was trying to use aid to force him to comply with its wishes, Nasser retorted that he learned not to depend on the West in 1957. Now it was obvious, he argued, "he would have to go back to 1957."57 He felt angry that Kennedy would not force the Saudis to stop arming royalists in Yemen; that perhaps the U.S. preferred to see Egyptian involvement there because it would reduce the Egyptian threat to Israel.58

Ernest Gruening, Senator from Alaska, had long dissented from both Eisenhower and Kennedy's foreign policies. In general terms, Gruening believed that the United States needed to be more selective in its administration of foreign aid. He argued that the Cold War mentality persuaded American presidents to financially and militarily support regimes that were often dictatorial and repressive. His interest in this topic began in U.S.-Latin American relations and later extended to Vietnam. Throughout his career, Gruening would protest the spending of American resources on regimes that did not support democratic systems or interfered with the nationalistic aspirations of other nations. Just because a regime was anti-communist did not mean it corresponded ideologically to American aims.59

Throughout his tenure in office, Gruening proposed bills and amendments that would limit the amount of American foreign aid and force the executive branch to make a

56 Rusk to Badeau, September 20 and Ball to Badeau, September 30, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
57 Bundy to Fulbright, November 11 and 13, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
58 Mohammad Heikal, The Cairo Documents, 221-222.
better accounting of its expenditures. By the mid 1960s, Gruening was simply the leading figure in a growing group of Democrats who protested their own party's foreign aid spending. Others who would eventually support the amendment of 1963 included Wayne Morse of Oregon, Otto Passman of Louisiana, and Paul Douglas of Illinois. Republicans and these few, dissenting Democrats became increasingly convinced that the U.S. was spending too much money on repressive, foreign regimes better spent at home. Yet, this criticism did not extend to Vietnam until much later. Gruening, however, would oppose intervention in Vietnam from the beginning, voting against the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution in 1964.

Gruening was of Jewish descent, although he did not like to acknowledge his heritage. He believed his policies toward American foreign aid were not about being pro-Israel. Still, he admired Israel's democratic system and wanted the ideological orientation of foreign regimes to be the acid test of whether they deserved American aid. Nasser did not fit with his aim to reward and support democratic regimes. The crisis in Yemen also angered Gruening, who thought Nasser was using American aid to fight for his own agenda. In his view, Israel represented a "good government" that the U.S. could support, while Nasser represented a dictatorial one. Gruening was even more adamant in his condemnation of American support for Latin American dictators than he was over Middle East policy.

Coverage of the Gruening Amendment in the Egyptian press took an interesting slant. The reaction was angry, yet calm, with certain members of Congress and the Jewish lobby taking most of the blame. Kennedy and the State Department opposed the amendment, and argued that the results would adversely affect the U.S. more than the Egypt. Editorials drew a parallel to the Dulles' decision in 1956 to withdraw American

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60 Johnson, Ernest Gruening and the American Dissenting Tradition, 205.
61 Ibid., 252-3
62 Ibid., 219,233-236.
aid for the Aswan Dam. The Egyptian press also insisted that impact of the Gruening Amendment on Egypt would be minimal, but that it damaged Western influence. 63

Ironically, no one seems to have made the argument that technically, the Gruening Amendment might also limit American aid to Israel. Although its regime was democratic, the amendment restricted aid from countries engaged in aggression or preparations for aggression against other nations. Neither Kennedy nor Congress, however, viewed Israel as preparing for military aggression against its neighbors. Israel argued that all it sought was security against aggression by others. In retrospect, however, it is clear that Israel was actively planning for and often seeking war with Arab states to further expand its boundaries.

Although primarily directed at the U.A.R., the Gruening Amendment also endangered American aid to such other countries as India, Pakistan, Algeria, and Morocco. Rusk suggested to Kennedy that he seek an amendment that would allow PL-480 humanitarian assistance to these countries. 64 Events in Dallas on November 22 prevented any further action. It was clear that Congress, at least, had made its choice between Arab nationalism and Israel. Lyndon Johnson would now have to decide whether to follow Kennedy's initiatives or chart his own course.

63 Badeau to Rusk, November 13, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.
64 Rusk to Kennedy, November 13, 1963, NSF Box 169, JFKL.

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CHAPTER 11

AFTER THE NEW FRONTIER

The presidency of John F. Kennedy is memorable primarily for the Cuban Missile crisis, the military buildup in Vietnam, the Berlin Wall, and the space race. While his Middle East policy appeared to be of secondary importance at best, his overtures toward the area there laid a foundation for Lyndon Johnson's approach to the region. In many ways, therefore, Kennedy's legacy was not apparent until the late 1960s.

At the time of Kennedy's assassination, American policy toward the Middle East was in the process of reverting to familiar patterns. The conflict in Yemen had overshadowed attempts at rapprochement with Nasser. Kennedy had placed American military forces in Saudi Arabia to demonstrate support for the monarchy and received increasing pressure from Congress to withdraw aid from Egypt until Nasser pulled out of Yemen. Circumstances had forced Kennedy to choose between loyalty to conservative Arab regimes and a new openness and friendship with Nasser's form of Arab nationalism. The choice to sell HAWK missiles to Israel also completely dashed any hope for a solution to the Arab refugee issue or of demonstrating a tough hand with Israel. In fact, while American military aid to Israel between 1953 and 1961 had only amounted to slightly less than a million dollars total, by the end of 1963 it reached nearly 13 million each year.1 Traditional American strategic goals of protecting Western access to oil and keeping Soviet influence at a minimum induced Kennedy to back conservative


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regimes that cooperated with these objectives. Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Israel used American fears to gain financial, political, and military support from the United States.

Progressive regimes, such as Syria, Iraq, and Egypt, began to separate themselves further from any cooperation with the West while still receiving American aid. Nasser had come to seriously question his relationship with the United States by the end of the Kennedy administration. He resented efforts to use aid to force him to withdraw from Yemen and doubted that Kennedy's rhetoric about Arab nationalism corresponded to his vision of change for the region. A rift was growing between them, but Nasser and Kennedy did succeed in one area where others previously had failed: they kept the issue of Palestine "in the ice-box" as Nasser had proposed years before. Cooperation with Arab nationalism and rapprochement with Nasser at least helped delay another war between Israel and the Arab states.

Johnson and the Six-Day War

President Lyndon Johnson continued the trend started late in Kennedy's administration: to draw closer to Israel at the expense of relations with Arab states. From the start, Johnson had demonstrated his strong sympathies toward Israel. He supported the founding of Israel in 1948 and actively sought Jewish-American votes in his subsequent political career. Johnson viewed all forms of Arab nationalism as threats to American strategic concerns in the region. He complained that rulers like Nasser were not more cooperative with American policies in spite of large amounts of American aid. Why invest in Arab countries if they were not going to support American policies? Johnson deemed it a waste of effort that only frightened and angered loyal supporters such as
Israel, the Shah of Iran, and the Saudi monarchy. American friendship for Arab nationalism threatened Israeli security, as Johnson saw it. Supporting Nasser and leaders of his kind was contrary to American strategic aims.\(^2\) Essentially, Johnson’s policy meant the end to Nasser’s positive neutralism. The United States had written Egypt off, so now Nasser had to rely on the Soviets. Still, Nasser’s policy had proven very successful.

According to former C.I.A. agent Miles Copeland, Nasser probably received ten times the aid he would otherwise have received if he had aligned himself with either superpower. By playing both sides, even if temporarily, he reaped enormous dividends.\(^3\)

Johnson’s main interests, however, were domestic and he devoted most of his energies as president to plans for his Great Society. Eventually, Vietnam would absorb his attention to foreign policy. At the start of his presidency, Johnson largely ignored the Middle East except to reassure Israel of America’s ongoing recognition of a “special relationship.” Meanwhile, a series of Arab summits seemed to demonstrate a new unity among the Arab states. In January 1964, Nasser hosted a summit in Cairo where Arab leaders discussed the water issue and created joint plans to divert the headwaters of the Jordan River to prevent Israel from beginning its planned irrigation of the Negev Desert.\(^4\) The water issue became a major flash point for anti-Israeli sentiment, even though Johnson would pay little attention to the problem.

Later, in September 1964, Arab leaders held another summit at Alexandria where they created a Unified Arab Military Command under leadership of the Egyptian army. They also formed a new organization, the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO), as

\(^2\) Kaufman, 45-46.


the legal representation of the Arab refugees. They shaped this body as an umbrella organization for eight different guerilla groups opposed to any negotiated settlement with Israel. This action was an effort by Arab leaders to control radicals who used terrorist tactics that would likely provoke war between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Recognizing they were not ready for another war with Israel, Nasser and the other members of the Arab League needed to create a feeling of legitimacy for the Arab refugees from Palestine, while keeping them under control. One of the guerilla groups thus incorporated was al-Fatah, led by a Palestinian Arab named Yasir Arafat. While the creation of the PLO was only partially successful in controlling these groups at first, it would eventually become the voice of those later called “Palestinians.” Arafat and his al-Fatah leadership eventually dominated and controlled the PLO. 5

A third summit at Casablanca a year later further cemented the improved relations between traditional and “revolutionary” regimes. Even conservative King Hussein of Jordan felt the need for rapprochement with Nasser and he entered into a military alliance with Egypt. 6 As the Arab world temporarily united, a major rallying point was its collective disdain for the United States. Nasser in particular was angry at continued Western support for conservative regimes, and a British arms deal with Saudi Arabia for 100 million pounds only supported his fears. He believed that Britain and the United States both worked to destroy nationalist forces in Yemen and neighboring Aden. To make matters worse, American hesitation to renew grain shipment agreements with Nasser increased his suspicion. 7 When the Saudis and Iran joined in late 1965 in calling

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5 Little, “America and the Middle East,” 292-293
6 Kaufmann, 46-47.
for a "conference of Islamic states" to rival Nasser's Arab coalition, Nasser saw it as further evidence of Western efforts to destroy his form of nationalism. Even King Hussein briefly joined the alliance with Iran and Saudi Arabia, which persuaded Nasser to stay embroiled in the struggle in Yemen. Only onset of war with Israel in June 1967 would end Egypt's involvement in the Yemeni civil war.

During this period of Arab unity, the Soviet Union was busy supplying Egypt and Syria with tanks and planes. Talbot and others in Johnson's administration were troubled with this buildup and feared that Jordan would be next on the supply list of the Soviet Union. King Hussein, always clever at manipulating American presidents into giving him aid, now requested American tanks and planes to counter Soviet sales to his neighbors. Hussein argued that if the U.S. did not supply the hardware, he had to purchase it from the Soviets in order to ensure his survival. At first, Johnson refused the request, but when the militancy of Arab refugees in Jordan increasingly threatened Hussein's regime, Johnson finally agreed to a major arms sale in 1965. Historian Douglass Little gives an excellent description of King Hussein's aims during this period:

No one should underestimate the importance of his [Hussein's] manipulative diplomacy. For years, Hussein had exaggerated the Soviet threat to extract financial and political commitments from the United States. By ostentatiously seeking arms from the Kremlin during the early 1960s, Hussein managed to obtain tanks and planes from the Johnson administration despite vocal Israeli opposition.

Hussein was now following Nasser's model of playing both sides of the Cold War against each other.

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8 Lunt, 79-80.
9 Talbot to Chiefs of Mission in Arab states, March 18, 1965, NSF Box 116 LBJL.
10 Rusk to Johnson, February 19, 1965, NSF Box 116, LBJL.
11 Little, "A Puppet in Search of a Puppeteer?," 543-44.

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The Israeli response to the sale, needless to say, was anger. Prime Minister Eshkol argued that armed enemies now surrounded Israel and it mattered little where the weapons came from. Johnson thereupon agreed to sell Israel 200 tanks that it requested and he considered selling jet fighters. The arms sale and Hussein’s ongoing attempts to stop the Fedeyeen from launching guerilla operations from Jordan ended the brief cooperation of Arab regimes.

The beginnings of a real breach in the uneasy Arab unity came with a Syrian coup in 1966. The Baathist party in Syria had attracted a large number of militant Alawis, a small rural sect, who found the party’s socialist and unionist ideals attractive. The Alawis practiced an ancient blend of Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs, worshiping Ali, Mohammad’s son-on-law, as an incarnation of God. Eventually, these young idealists came to believe that the founders of the party had abandoned its true principles by insisting on its independence from Egypt. Led by General Hafiz al-Asad, a new Syrian regime rebuilt the Egyptian-Syrian relationship. Nasser hoped to control Syria through this alliance, but it only made the Syrians more confident in its border clashes with Israel. Eventually, Syria’s continuing “water war” with Israel led directly to armed conflict in June 1967.

Meanwhile, the Johnson administration assessed its policy toward the region. State Department officials advised Johnson that American weapons sales to both Jordan and Israel maintained a delicate balance that would deter war. They argued that the Soviets continued to try to infiltrate the region through its own weapons sales and that

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12 Recommendations of Near East Arms, 1965, no author, NSF Box 116, LBJL.
13 Heikal, 236.
American sales had merely evened out the score, rather than exacerbating the problem. Violence nonetheless continued to erupt along Israel's armistice lines throughout 1966 and into the following year.

Israel's response to guerilla operations by Fedeyeen and other groups inspired a notorious attack by the Israeli army on the village of Samu inside the West Bank of Jordan in November 1966. This action and Jordan's counter-attack turned into a four-hour battle that left eighteen people dead and others wounded. The United Nations Security Council censured Israel for this raid and the United States decided not to veto the resolution. Now Israel felt isolated and surrounded by enemies, Hussein felt vulnerable as Arab refugees and others agitated for his overthrow, and guerilla raids and reprisals continued along the border with Syria. War now seemed inevitable and Johnson worked hard in the days before June 5, 1967, to persuade both Arabs and Israel to maintain calm.

Rumors of Israeli troops massing along the Syrian border, however, led Nasser to move his forces toward the Sinai and to eventually request removal of the United Nations observers from the peninsula. When he blocked the Straits of Tiran, which provided access to the Israeli port of Elat, Israel insisted that its security was threatened. Israel needed access to the Gulf of Aqaba because most of her oil shipments came that way after 1957. Israel based part of its agreement to withdraw from Sinai after the crisis in 1956 on the assurance that Israel would have access into the Gulf of Aqaba through the straits. Israel thus declared that closing the straits was an act of war. Johnson affirmed his friendship with Israel and vowed to help open the straits with military action if necessary.

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15 Saunders to Rostow, June 24, 1966, NSF Box 116, LBJL.
He reminded Prime Minister Eshkol that “Israel will not be alone unless it decides to go alone.” Nevertheless, Israel attacked the Egyptian air force on June 5, 1967, beginning the June War or Six-Day War, and by June 10, when the United Nations finally negotiated a cease-fire, Israel held the entire West Bank of Jordan, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and Syria’s Golan Heights. Neither Johnson nor any of his advisors could persuade Israel to give up the territory.

In the wake of the June War, Egypt, Syria, Sudan, Algeria, Iraq, and Yemen, all broke diplomatic relations with the United States. The General Assembly of the United Nations passed Resolution 242, which called for Israel to vacate the territories new occupied in the conflict in exchange for Arab recognition of Israel’s right to exist. Since the resolution was not specific about the territories, Israel argued that it did not refer to all the areas it had just occupied, but Arabs thought it did. Either way, Israel ignored the resolution and Johnson gave up trying to bring about peace negotiations. Although Johnson was frustrated at Israel’s stance after the war, he had little time to worry about it as the war in Vietnam reached a critical point with the Tet Offensive in 1968.

American policy toward the Middle East after the June 1967 war shifted even more dramatically in favor of Israel. Even though Johnson had tried to prevent Israel from going to war, he did support its decision to act. Congress would happily supply Israel with all the weapons it wanted as the Soviets worked hard to re-supply and rebuild Egyptian and Syrian forces. The United States replaced France as the primary source of arms to the region. While levels of military aid through 1967 generally remained at the

17 Memorandum of Conversation, Johnson and Abba Eban, May 30, 1967, NSF Box 12, LBJL.
18 Department of State to Johnson, “Arms for Jordan and Israel,” NSF Box 104, LBJL; Rostow to Johnson, August 7, 1967, NSF Box 7, LBJL.
levels established by Kennedy, these levels doubled after the June War, from 12-13 million to 25 million dollars per year.¹⁹

Even though the United States did not actively participate in the June War, Nasser accused it of doing so and subsequently refused any form of cooperation with the West. Israeli occupation of Arab lands led directly to another war in 1973. Perhaps the tide would have turned in this direction under Johnson regardless of Kennedy’s policies. Nonetheless, Kennedy’s willingness to sell HAWK missiles to Israel in 1962 was the turning point in the U.S.-Israeli relationship. The sale of missiles to Israel was the first time the U.S. armed Israel, something it had previously avoided. Once this process began, it alienated Arab states and tipped the balance in favor of Israel. Kennedy started the trend toward a closer relationship with Israel and Johnson continued and built upon his legacy.

Middle East Players Evaluated

An examination of U.S.-Middle East relations during the 1960s reveals an important fact: all of the regional heads-of-state managed to get at least part of what they wanted from the United States without giving very much in return. In the “game of nations,” as Miles Copeland called it, Middle East rulers formed their policy toward the superpowers according to local, not global, issues. While Kennedy, Khrushchev, and other European leaders approached the region according to Cold War strategy, Middle East rulers used superpower aims to accomplish local, strategic goals. Some, of course, achieved more than others did.

¹⁹ El-Khawas and Abed-Rabbo, 35.
As part of his Middle East policy, Kennedy sought to stabilize traditional regimes such as Iran, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia by encouraging internal reforms. In Iran, the Shah managed to procure larger and larger amounts of dollars and military equipment by arguing that his proximity to the Soviet Union made him a critical buffer to Khrushchev’s aims for the region. Iran’s geographic location and its oil resources were probably the strongest factors the Shah was able to parlay into increasing amounts of American aid. Although the strongest challenges to his regime were internal, non-communist ones, he was able to convince the West that his major opponents were tools of the Soviets. Whenever his leadership was challenged, either by a political party or an activist prime minister, like Muhammad Mossadeq or Ali Amini, the Shah was able to persuade the United States that his country would be safer from communism under his direct control.

Even though he approached the West from a strong position, the Shah did find it necessary to pose as a reformer in order to keep the flow of American aid coming. When he launched his “White Revolution” in late 1962, American policy-makers took the Shah’s rhetoric as proof that reform was occurring. Not everyone bought into the Shah’s program, but most people in the State Department did, so both Kennedy and Johnson accepted the Shah as a reformer and kept sending him large amounts of aid. The U.S. wanted to believe that the Shah was sincere, and chose to ignore evidence to the contrary, such as ongoing unrest among the Muslim clergy, and dissatisfaction among government officials and the middle class in general. He blamed any vocalization of dissatisfaction on communists. The Shah thus increased his control over Iran with constant American support. After Kennedy, no one in the U.S. questioned the Shah’s rule.
King Hussein of Jordan was also a very successful, traditional ruler who managed to obtain large amounts of American assistance during the 1960s. Although he was vulnerable because of his lack of internal resources, he was also in a geographically strategic position. Sharing a long border (armistice line) with Israel and positioned between three non-traditional regimes (Egypt, Syria, and Iraq), Hussein felt constantly under threat from Nasser and other pan-Arab forces. Nevertheless, the West also viewed him as an important buffer between rival leaders of the Arab world. Kennedy wanted to preserve Hussein’s royal regime in order to control the amount of power any one pan-Arab leader might gain. It was also important to keep a stable, Western ally along such a potentially explosive border with Israel.

Hence, Hussein did have important cards to play in the regional game because of his position and his relatively cordial relations (out of necessity) with Israel. Even though he could not claim any direct threat from communists or any danger to oil resources, Hussein managed to persuade the West to give him most of the support he wanted. In 1958, the British sent in troops in order to preserve his regime while his neighbors experienced unrest. In 1961 and 1962, he managed to look like a cooperative leader during the Johnson Refugee Plan negotiations and discussions over the Johnston Water Plan. While he never really demonstrated any reform, he kept the flow of American aid coming by threatening to obtain it from the Soviets. After the Yemen conflict broke out in late 1962, Hussein was able to plead for even more aid by again using the Soviets. Wanting to keep Hussein happy and cooperative, the U.S. increased its aid, even though the king sent planes to Saudi Arabia against American wishes. Although he was upset at Kennedy’s rapprochement with Nasser, Hussein managed to keep American interest and

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goodwill. Like the Shah, he always wanted more than he received. Even so, his policy toward the U.S. was largely a success.

Of the major players, Saudi Arabia probably needed American money the least. However, it did need Kennedy’s support in view of the growing tides of pan-Arabism and Nasser’s rhetoric campaigns against what he considered a corrupt regime. In order to preserve their traditional government in the face of Nasserism and pan-Arabism, Saud and Faisal needed American backing. Their location was also critical, like Jordan’s, because of possible threats from neighboring Iraq and Nasser’s intervention in Yemen. However, Saud did not need the United States as much as it needed him, or at least his oil. The fact that Saudi Arabia contained most of the U.S. oil resources from the Middle East meant that Saud could parlay this resource into significant aid and support.

Saud and Faisal understood that Nasser’s intervention in Yemen was about more than just this small country. It was about Nasser’s efforts to maintain his leadership of pan-Arabism and progressivism. Opposition to a royal regime in Yemen was symbolic of Nasser’s determination to encourage the overthrow of the Saudis, they argued. American presidents believed that the best way to preserve American access to Saudi oil was to preserve the royal regime. In spite of efforts to stay out of the fight over Yemen, the U.S. sent an air squadron to help bolster Saud and persuade Nasser to back down. While American military support to Saudi Arabia did not force Nasser out of Yemen, it did ensure the stability of the Saudi royal family and kept the conflict from spreading.

Although Kennedy tried to persuade Saud and Faisal to institute democratic and economic reforms in their country, he never attached conditions to U.S. aid to Saudi Arabia. In fact, the U.S. continued to use aid to ensure stability and to attempt to regain
rights to the Dhahran airfield that had expired during Kennedy’s administration. Saud had two large cards to play: oil and air bases. Saud probably received most of what he wanted or needed because of his strong, bargaining position. Occasional rhetoric about reform initiatives was more a gesture of respect than any real attempt to please the United States.

In the case of Israel, Ben-Gurion and Eshkol had American sentiment on their side. Not only did they have an effective Jewish lobby to work on their behalf inside the United States, but they could also pose as the only country in the region that was democratic. Ben-Gurion constantly drew parallels between the Israeli struggle for survival and the conquest of the American West. Israel posed as a pioneer in a hostile environment, a people who had suffered horrific crimes at the hands of the West and thus deserved a homeland and peace. Ironically, Israel did not have anything the United States truly needed such as oil, except that it provided a friendly foothold in a region presumably threatened by Soviet expansion. Although Kennedy wanted to keep his distance from Israel, Ben-Gurion was able to manipulate the United States into providing HAWK missiles and other weapons.

Israel had more than American sympathy to use in the game of strategy. The fact of its existence created instability in the region, ultimately threatening American access to oil. Thus, Kennedy hoped to make some real progress toward peace between Israel and its neighbors. Ben-Gurion could, therefore, use any American initiative as a tool to obtain more money and ultimately, American weapons. Ben-Gurion and Golda Meir pretended to cooperate on the Johnson Refugee Plan long enough to obtain HAWK missiles, and never made any real concessions. They also pretended to acquiesce on Jordan water allocations and inspections of the Dimona nuclear plant. In both cases, Israel continued
its own policies while giving lip service to American interests. Kennedy’s fear that Israel would develop nuclear weapons became a valuable tool Ben-Gurion used, along with the refugee negotiations, to obtain HAWK missiles.

Most importantly, however, Ben-Gurion wanted an American commitment to Israel’s security. He believed that Israel would never be secure without the backing of a world power, so an American alliance had always been his goal. The HAWK missiles were really only symbolic of a stronger American commitment to Israel and did not add much to Israel’s security. In the end, Ben-Gurion received a stronger American commitment (and missiles) without giving up anything. Perhaps he did not receive a formal alliance with the U.S., and often experienced backlash to his policies in the form of world criticism in the United Nations. What he wanted most, however, he received: a closer relationship with the United States and its unofficial, but effective guarantee of Israeli security.

Of the non-traditional regimes in the Middle East, Nasser was the most important and Kennedy specifically sought to draw him closer to the West. Although his relationship with Eisenhower had been strained, Nasser recognized he could gain from improved relations with the United States. Kennedy offered him PL-480 assistance and other aid for possible water and infrastructure projects. Nasser could use American aid to strengthen his economy and thus, his own political stability. At the same time, however, Nasser felt it vital to preserve a neutral stance between the superpowers in order to prove his legitimacy as leader of pan-Arabism. He wanted to prove to both Africa and the Middle East that Egypt was free of imperialism of any kind.
His position as recognized leader of pan-Arabism was perhaps the most important asset he could use to obtain American aid. His location and control of the Suez Canal also made him powerful and to make an enemy of him would endanger Western oil supplies. Thus situated, Nasser bargained from a very strong position. To keep him open to American policies for the region, Kennedy began increasing aid to Egypt without strings attached. Although some members of his administration urged him to push Nasser harder to reform, Kennedy was afraid to pressure him for fear he would simply get what he needed from the Soviets. Nasser had done this in the past and continued to receive substantial aid from both superpowers during the 1960s. All Kennedy could hope to do in the long run was balance what the Soviets sent to Egypt.

The fact that both superpowers wanted his cooperation meant that Nasser could take from both and give little or nothing to either. He was, in many ways, the most appealing consort, fending off rival suitors while accepting their gifts. Although Kennedy would sometimes complain to Nasser about anti-American rhetoric in the Egyptian press, or his later involvement in Yemen, there seemed little the president could do besides give or withhold money. In the end, neither decision gave the United States any control over Nasser's actions. He conducted his policy according to his regional aims, and took what he could from both the Soviets and Americans.

Other regional leaders, such as Qasim of Iraq, Chamoun and Chehab of Lebanon, the Emir of Kuwait, and the various prime ministers of Syria, seemed perhaps less successful at manipulating Western powers than the others. At closer inspection, however, each country displayed an ability to resist American pressure while obtaining military and economic aid. While the U.S.-Iraqi relationship was strained during Qasim's
administration, the regime that replaced him in 1963 sought better relations with the West. In exchange for little more than rhetoric, it received substantial weapons sales. Qasim ruined his chances for Western aid by threatening Kuwait in 1961. Prime Minister Abdul Salam Arif, however, exaggerated the power of communists inside Iraq in order to persuade Kennedy to sell him weapons, which the Americans subsequently did, with no strings attached. The U.S. was happy simply to re-establish normal relations with Iraq and asked for nothing in return for its aid.

Although Syrian leaders changed frequently, even this country was able to persuade Kennedy to occasionally side with it in UN discussions over the Sea of Galilee. The U.S. also sent Syria money in the wake of its split from the U.A.R. in 1961 in order to keep Soviet influence out of the country. Later, Syria used the HAWK sale to Israel as an opportunity to demand more American aid, which Kennedy provided. Because of its proximity to Israel and Iraq, Syria was strategically important. Therefore, it was able to purchase weapons and receive economic support from both superpowers, as Nasser did, with no strings attached. It sacrificed nothing to obtain this assistance.

Lebanon and Kuwait mostly remained on the periphery of regional struggles, important mostly for water and oil resources, respectively. The actions of Syria and Israel in Lebanon would necessitate American support for Chamoun and later Chehab’s regime. Neither leader had to institute reforms in order to receive this aid. Kuwait did receive pressure from the West to give money to needy countries in the Middle East and Africa, and eventually, the little Emirate did give money in order to garner regional support and Western favor. However, Kuwait really needed only assurance of military security and when it was threatened by Qasim in 1961, Saudi Arabia and Egypt proved just as
interested in Kuwait's security as Britain and the United States. Its strategic value meant that no regional power wanted any other to control Kuwait. The Emir could thus obtain help from the West or refuse it whenever it suited him.

Who was the most successful in dealing with the West? The answer is probably a tie between Hussein of Jordan, the Shah of Iran, and Ben-Gurion of Israel. All three leaders were able to obtain large amounts of dollars in exchange for virtually nothing. Neither Jordan nor Israel made any major policy concessions during the Kennedy or Johnson administrations and received ever-increasing amounts of aid. The fact that neither Jordan nor Israel was directly involved in the Yemen crisis also meant that the American Congress did not try to withdraw aid. The Shah pretended to reform, but only had to create the appearance of change, not the reality. All three recognized that the Americans feared Soviet activities in the region and used their strategic locations between rival Arab regimes to obtain what they wanted. Both Israel and Jordan were important players in any kind of initiative for the Arab refugees, so Ben-Gurion and Hussein could pretend cooperation with this aim to obtain more aid. They could also blame each other for failure.

Gamal Abd al-Nasser comes next in the ranking of successful players. Although he would not receive unquestioned support from the United States like the Shah or Hussein did, he managed to play both sides of the Cold War effectively. His intervention in Yemen eventually damaged his relationship with the United States, but in the end, both East and West would continue to woo Nasser in various ways. He did not have to make peace with Israel or any of the Arab rulers in order to obtain American aid, until the Yemen crisis. Then, Nasser was forced to choose between dollars and his leadership of
progressivism in the Middle East. His need for American aid was not strong enough to force him to choose in America's favor.

It is difficult to rank the Saudis because they had more at stake in their relationship with the United States. They deserve ranking behind Nasser only because of growing criticism of the royal regime inside Saudi Arabia. Although they never made any significant concessions to the United States and continued to receive monetary and military support, they did believe they needed American assistance to counter Nasser's actions in Yemen. Their oil and location, however, were enough reasons for Kennedy to maintain a solid relationship with Saudi Arabia. In the end, the Saudis did little except preserve Western access to oil in return for American support. Still, this was a significant concession at a time when critics inside the country demanded more revenues and control over Saudi oil.

Although Syria, Iraq, Lebanon, and Kuwait come at the end of the list, all four did successfully obtain military support from the United States because of their possible strategic benefits to all sides of regional contests. In reality, the separation between any of these leaders in terms of their success is very slight. None received all they wanted, but none were forced to give up or concede very much in return. In the end, American policy toward the Middle East was guided (sometimes purposefully manipulated) by the policies of regional leaders. Cold War issues were only important when Middle East countries could use this larger struggle to obtain aid and assurances from both sides.
American Policy-makers Evaluated

Although conflicting goals of regional leaders (both with each other and with the United States) proved the largest barrier to American policy success, conflicts inside the Kennedy administration also created difficulties. The result was that Kennedy's policy was a confusing mixture of conflicting approaches. Of the various players, the most important ones were the State Department, the National Security Council, the Congress, and the Presidency itself. While most in Kennedy's administration shared his fundamental goal of balancing the American relationship between Israel and Arab states, there was much disagreement on methods and approaches.

On a day-to-day basis, the State Department probably did most of the formation and execution of policy toward the region as a whole. However, State's approach often conflicted with the NSC or at least certain members. Dean Rusk and his ambassadors and diplomats frequently conflicted with Kennedy's aims. While the President sought a new approach to the region, the State Department sought to maintain the status quo. Rusk, Talbot, and others supported new approaches to Nasser and advocated that the U.S. avoid selling weapons to Israel. They did not wish, however, to see American aid to Nasser or anyone else used to push or force regional leaders to reform. State's attitude was to aid where feasible and hope that such aid would lead to a closer relationship to the West and less dependence on the East. Beyond this aim, however, it was reluctant to go.

Rusk and his ambassadors believed that pushing the Shah, for example, would only encourage him to draw closer to the Soviets, who would certainly not push for democratic reforms. Pushing Nasser contained the same risks. State did continue, however, to support assistance to Nasser, even after other groups such as Congress had
given up on him. Rusk did not expect to change Nasser, only to gently influence him slowly over time. On the other hand, the State Department opposed increased aid to Israel, especially selling HAWK missiles. Although Rusk and the State Department's diplomats did not vigorously oppose the sale, they registered their discomfort, arguing that such a sale would counteract efforts to balance both sides.

The National Security Council, on the other hand, wanted to change the status quo. Like Kennedy, McGeorge Bundy and company wanted to push Nasser, the Shah, the Israelis, Saudis, and Hussein into alignment with U.S. aims for the region. Both Bundy and his most vocal NSC member, Robert Komer, wanted to use aid to force the Shah to institute democratic reforms, to encourage Nasser to do the same, and for all recipients to make important economic changes to ensure stability and develop eventual financial independence. While the State Department did not believe these leaders could or should be forced to change, the NSC believed it should "get something for its money" as Robert Komer would put it.

Likewise, the NSC supported and encouraged the sale of HAWK missiles to Israel, in exchange for agreements on the Johnson Refugee Plan, the Johnston Water Allocation Plan, and the Dimona nuclear plant. The Defense Department supported this position and encouraged the sale of HAWKS to Israel. For the most part, the Defense Department supported the NSC approach to the region and encouraged the sale of military weapons to Israel and traditional Arab regimes.

Kennedy, faced with conflicting advice from the NSC and State Department, attempted to walk a middle road. He often took Rusk's advice not to push the Shah, Hussein, Nasser or the Saudis too hard for reform. He also chose to provide aid to Nasser
and other Arab countries without strings attached. He hoped that this approach would quietly encourage reform while avoiding accusations of imperialism. Komer and Bundy would later voice frustration that while Kennedy might have succeeded in this aim, he also failed to achieve anything concrete for all the money spent.

Eventually, Congress agreed with Komer and while the NSC simply advocated continued spending on Nasser and others, with strings attached, Congress decided in 1963 to begin limiting spending to the region (except Israel). Congress was especially upset at Nasser’s intervention in Yemen and was disappointed that American money did not deter his actions. Lyndon Johnson would agree with Congress and eventually, give up on Nasser and draw ever closer to Israel. The fact that Kennedy faced so many conflicts within his own administration contributed to this trend that Johnson continued.

The Legacy of Kennedy’s Approach

Not many historians or even the policy-makers themselves have assessed Kennedy’s Middle East strategy, but among those who have, there are differences of opinion. On the one hand are the positive assessments. No one should be expected to perform miracles, they argue. Improving the U.S.-Middle East relationship is probably the best anyone could do. Mordechai Gazit argued that when Johnson cut aid to Nasser and he turned for help to the Soviets, it only demonstrated the fact that Kennedy’s aid to Egypt had been a good decision.②⁰ Herbert Parmet argued that even though military ties with Israel increased under Kennedy, so did “a better dialogue...with the other side.”②¹ He suggested that these small beginnings would eventually lead to the Egyptian-Israeli

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②⁰ Gazit, President Kennedy’s Policy Toward the Arab States and Israel (Tel Aviv: Shiloah Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies, 1983): 29.
peace treaty. Douglas Little argued that in spite of many failures, Kennedy "came closer than any other American president to solving the bloody riddle that has bedeviled the Middle East for more than a generation." Unfortunately for Kennedy, the war in Yemen derailed his best intentions.

Others are less generous in their evaluation of Kennedy's policy. Bruce Miroff argued that Kennedy's legacy was largely negative because he "made the central philosophy of his presidency the idea of a monolithic communist drive, headed by the Soviet Union, to achieve world domination." Arie Shpiez charged that Kennedy failed in the Middle East because of his support of conservative regimes. This support only radicalized some regimes further and eroded Arab support for Western policies. Richard Walton accused Kennedy of misunderstanding the nature of Arab nationalism in the region, thinking he could "manipulate" it for Western purposes. Tura Campanella further accused Kennedy of creating an arms race in the Middle East that would eventually lead to more war.

Perhaps the most balanced view of Kennedy's legacy came from Thomas Patterson. He assessed Kennedy's foreign policy in the following way:

At times there seems to be two John Kennedys: the confrontationist and the conciliator, the hawk and the dove, the decisive leader and the improviser, the bellicose politician and the cautious diplomat. Kennedy's foreign policy was a mixture of sincere idealism and hard-headed pragmatism, of traditional anti-

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22 Little, "From Even-handed to Empty-Handed," 177.
communist fervor, on the one hand, and weariness over the constraints of knee-jerk anti-communism on the other.\textsuperscript{27}

Perhaps this view of Kennedy’s dual-character is not surprising, since American aims in the Middle East were also often conflicting and confusing. Any assessment of Kennedy’s policy toward this region needs to consider this fact.

Kennedy had a unique opportunity to change American policy toward the Middle East. Unlike the two presidents before and the two after him, Kennedy did not have to deal with an Arab-Israeli war during his tenure. This factor made it easier for him to take a fresh approach to the region. The problem was, however, that there remained the age-old conflict: the clash between what might appear to be a fair and “even-handed” approach to both Israel and Arab states, and what might have to be done to suit the immediate wishes and interests of the United States. Kennedy, no less than the presidents before and after him, struggled with this dilemma.

What goals then, did Kennedy accomplish from his Three-Pronged Plan? The first prong of the plan called for maintaining the stability of traditional regimes in the region while encouraging them toward moderate and gradual reforms. This goal was aimed at Iran, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Israel. These “pillars of stability” were to lead the region in democratic reforms and economic self-sufficiency while avoiding revolutionary unrest. It was not an anti-nationalist policy, but certainly opposed radical change and of course, communism. It was also important to keep a strong, foothold in the region via Israel and access to oil via Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran.

In some ways, Kennedy was most successful in this area. The royal regimes were preserved and often strengthened, at least in the short-term. The failure to make internal

\textsuperscript{27} Thomas G. Patterson, “John F. Kennedy and the World,” 124.

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reforms, however, would lead to the Shah’s downfall and to the rise of militant Islam in the region. However, it is not at all clear that Kennedy or any other American president could have prevented these events. Historians can only guess if democratic reforms would truly have changed the course of later events in the region. What can be said is that the United States continued, much as it had before, to spend money on regimes that did not make any concessions in return. In this sense, Kennedy’s efforts to change policy direction failed.

His second prong, however – to draw Nasser closer to the West – was at least partially successful. Nasser did appreciate Kennedy’s attempts to communicate with him and understand his viewpoints on the region. He also was happy to receive American assistance and assured Kennedy that he would never allow the Soviets to direct his policies. His willingness to keep the issue of Israel “in the ice-box” was partly to encourage the American relationship, and mostly because he could not afford a war. For a while, then, Kennedy and Nasser’s aims coincided enough to create a working relationship.

In the end, however, Kennedy was not able to push Nasser toward economic or democratic reforms that he thought Egypt needed. Nor was he able to persuade Nasser to eschew all Soviet aid or disengage from Yemen. While it is not certain what direction the relationship would have taken if Kennedy had lived, Congress was already withdrawing aid to Egypt before Kennedy died and Lyndon Johnson would later give up completely on Nasser. Thus, Kennedy’s second prong was also an eventual failure.

The third prong of Kennedy’s plan – the Arab refugee problem – was yet another failure. In the beginning, Kennedy had high hopes for the Johnson Refugee Plan, and
while talks continued, Nasser, Hussein, and Ben-Gurion all pretended to cooperate. In fact, Joseph Johnson probably did make significant headway with Arab leaders, but both he and Kennedy failed to understand that Israel was only pretending cooperation. This plan was doomed from the beginning because Israel would never agree to repatriation of any Arabs, nor would it ever agree to give up any amount of land in exchange for peace. Thus ended Kennedy’s biggest hope for an Arab-Israeli peace.

Still, one might ask, how realistic were his aims? Perhaps Kennedy’s plan for the region illustrated his idealistic side, while actual policy and results illustrated the realpolitik approach of his administration. Kennedy does deserve some credit. He did create a better relationship with Nasser and while there were no grand reforms, his policy did preserve traditional regimes in the region. Although Israel (and Arabs) refused to sign the Johnston Water Allocation Agreement, all sides did temporarily abide by its terms. Kennedy also managed to keep Syria and Israel from possible war over the Sea of Galilee. Even though Israel continued to lie about the purposes of the Dimona plant, Kennedy finally negotiated an inspection and more were to follow under Johnson.

Kennedy also managed to persuade the Saudis and Hussein to keep out of direct engagement in Yemen. Eventually, however, Nasser’s involvement there would damage his relationship with the United States. He also maintained some degree of relationship with countries experiencing instability, such as Syria and Iraq. In many ways, Kennedy did conduct an even-handed approach to the region as a whole. The problem was, of course, Israel. Why Kennedy decided to sell HAWK missiles to the United States is frequently debated. It is clear that the President hoped to use the missile to gain Israeli cooperation on the refugees and the Dimona reactor. In both cases, this policy failed. His
willingness to sell the missiles before Israel signed any agreements, however, leads one
to believe that he would have sold the missiles anyway. If Israel maintained, not just
military equality, but superiority, then Arab countries might think twice before attacking.
The result of this reasoning was two-fold: the creation of an arms race in the Middle East,
and a tip in the balance of U.S. policy toward Israel.

Did Kennedy learn anything from his experiences? Unfortunately, his
assassination makes this question impossible to answer. There is no evidence that
Kennedy conducted any serious evaluation of his Middle East policy before his death.
Nevertheless, perhaps there are lessons to be learned forty years later. Certainly, one can
argue that a government must not conduct policy without a thorough understanding of
regional politics. If American diplomats had studied and understood Ben-Gurion’s aims
for Israel, they would not have taken him at his word regarding nuclear weapons
development. A better understanding of the conflicts between pan-Arabism and
individual nationalities could have assisted the United States in forming relationships
with the U.A.R. and Iraq. It might also have helped Congress understand why Nasser was
involved in Yemen and perhaps maintain a relationship with him.

One of the most important lessons to learn from the Kennedy administration is
that best laid plans often fail because they lack a thorough understanding of regional
interests and needs. While some diplomats in the field naturally understood Middle East
issues better than Congress did, these ideas were not adequately communicated to those
at home making the decisions and vice versa. The conflicts between the State
Department and the NSC made this important task difficult, if not impossible.
The story of U.S.-Middle East relations during the Cold War years illustrates much about the nature of power relations and offers a new view of the meaning of the superpower struggle. The Kennedy years were particularly significant because they illustrate the difficulty the United States had in reconciling its competing aims for the region. The period also confirms the fact that peripheral powers were much more than mere victims or pawns in the East-West struggle. They contributed to the conflict and perhaps enhanced it by using the Cold War to further their own regional aims.

In the final analysis, historians cannot blame any of the American presidents, including Kennedy, for the absence of peace in the Middle East. While Kennedy certainly did view the region in terms of the East-West conflict, such leaders as Nasser, Ben-Gurion, Hussein, the Shah, and the Saudis, all used American fears of Soviet penetration to meet local needs. When they did not receive what they needed from the United States, they played the same game with the Soviet Union. Both super-powers funneled money and support to the region to gain the upper hand in the Cold War contest, while regional leaders used this aid and support to achieve local aims. In a classic example of the tail wagging the dog, Middle East leaders often manipulated superpowers and perhaps even lengthened the Cold War as a result. This example of power relationships and their workings further erodes the concept of “first” and “third” worlds. It should also force the United States to re-evaluate its approach to supposedly minor world players when creating foreign policy.
Appendix A

Map of Jordan River Basin
Appendix A
Map of Jordan River Basin
Appendix B

Cast of Characters
Appendix B

Cast of Characters

Abdullah, King of Jordan: founder of the State of Transjordan and its Hashemite dynasty, 1921-52.


Ahmad, King of Yemen: King from 1948-1962.


al-Azma, Bashir: Prime Minister of Syria in 1962.

al-Azm, Khalid: Prime Minister of Syria, 1962-63.


al-Badr, Muhammed: King of Yemen, 1962, deposed after one week by a military coup.

Bakhtiar, Teimur: Iranian Lieutenant General; chief of Iranian security and intelligence.


Bundy, McGeorge: Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, 1961-66.


Brubeck, William: Executive Secretary, U.S. Department of State, 1961-63.

Byrnes, James: U.S. Secretary of State, 1945-57.

Chamoun, Camile: President of Lebanon, 1952-58.

Chehab, Fuad: President of Lebanon, 1958-64.

Dayan, Moshe: Israeli Minister of Agriculture, 1959-64, and later served as Foreign Minister.

Dulles, John Foster: U.S. Secretary of State, 1953-59.

Eban, Abba: Israeli Minister of Education and Culture, 1960-63, and later served as Foreign Minister.

Ebtehaj, Abdhassan: Director of the Plan Organization of Iran, 1957-60.

Emami Jafar Sharif: Prime Minister of Iran, 1960-61.


Farmanfarmaian, Khodadad: Representative of the Plan Organization of Iran, beginning in 1958.

Fawzi, Mahmoud: Foreign Minister of the U.A.R. during the Kennedy Administration.

Faisal, Abd al-Aziz Ibn: Crown Prince of Saudi Arabia until 1964, then King from 1964-75.

Faisal II, King of Iraq: King from 1953 until his death in 1958.

Feldman, Myer: Deputy special counsel to President Kennedy.

Gaud, William: Near East Coordinator for the Agency for International Development (AID).

Gazit, Mordechai: Minister, Israeli embassy in Washington, D.C. during the Kennedy Administration.

Hamilton, Fowler: Administrator of the Agency for International Development (AID).
Hansen, Kenneth: Assistant director, Bureau of the Budget during the Kennedy Administration.

Harman, Avraham: Israeli Ambassador to the U.S. during the Kennedy Administration.


Hilsman, Roger: Member of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, during the Kennedy Administration.


Hughes, Thomas: Member of the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Department of State, during the Kennedy Administration.


Johnson, Joseph E.: Special Representative, UN Palestine Conciliation Commission during the Kennedy Administration.

Johnston, Eric: Water engineer, sent to Middle East during the Eisenhower Administration, 1953-55.

Kemal, Mustafa: U.A.R. Ambassador to the U.S. during the Kennedy Administration.

Knight, Ridgway: U.S. Ambassador to Syria during the Kennedy Administration.

Komer, Robert: senior staff member, National Security Council during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations, formerly of the C.I.A.

Macomber, William: U.S. Ambassador to Jordan during the Kennedy Administration.

Meir, Golda: Israeli Foreign Minister, 1956-66, and later served as Prime Minister.

Meyer, Armin: U.S. Ambassador to Lebanon during the Kennedy Administration.

Mossadeq, Mohammad: Prime Minister of Iran, 1951-53.

Naguib, Muhammad: President of Egypt and the U.A.R., 1953-54.


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Pahlavi, Muhammad Riza: Shah of Iran, 1941-79.

Peres, Shimon: Deputy Defense Minister of Israel, 1959-1965, and later served as Prime Minister.


al-Qudsi, Nazim: President of Syria, 1961-63.

al-Quwatli, Shukri: President of Syria, 1951-58.

Rostow, Walt: Economist, Policy Planning Council of the State Department, 1961-66, and Special Assistant to President Johnson.

Rusk, Dean: U.S. Secretary of State, 1961-69, and former U.S. Army Colonel.


Saunders, Harold: Staff Member, National Security Council during the Kennedy Administration.

Sharett, Moshe: Prime Minister of Israel, 1955-56 and Foreign Minister, 1948-56.


Talbot, Phillips: U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs during the Kennedy Administration.


Talal, Prince: Brother of King Saud of Saudi Arabia.

Talal I: King of Jordan, 1951-52, Father of King Hussein.

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