

Foreign Relations, 1961-1963, Volume XVII, Near East,

1961-1962

Released by the Office of the Historian

Documents 293-314

Letter From President Kennedy to Prime Minister Ben Gurion(1)

Washington, June 13, 1962.

Dear Mr. Prime Minister: I should like to take advantage of the offer you made at the conclusion of our conversations last year to be available for further exchanges of ideas and information. Since that time, there have been several developments in the matters we discussed, both in the Near East and in other parts of the world. Some have given rise to concern and anxiety; others provide a basis for hope that our ultimate objective of peace in the Near East can be achieved. Throughout this period, however, the United States policy has consistently included among its objectives the security and progress of Israel.

I have had reports, most recently, on the discussions between Deputy Defense Minister Shimon Peres and officials of the United States Government, and the matters he presented are currently being carefully examined. The maintenance of Israel's integrity and independence and her economic progress will continue to engage our full support.

I would hope that the present quiescence on the borders of Israel will continue undisturbed. But this should not cause us to relax our efforts to obtain a lasting and **permanent peace and good neighborliness between the Arab States and Israel and to resist doctrines of belligerence. I believe you share my feeling that the United Nations, despite any of its imperfections, remains an important bulwark against aggression of any kind.** Israel is entitled to have the calm of its borders respected by its neighbors. I hope that your Government will find it possible to cooperate fully with those functions of the United Nations which can be helpful in this regard.

My attention has recently been directed toward the advanced state of the program for the full development of water resources in the Near East. This program offers both agriculture and industry exciting prospects. It is dependent upon the implementation of Israel's plan to draw from the Jordan-Yarmuk River System those waters to which she is entitled under the plan drafted by former United States Ambassador Eric Johnston. This project is one which can and should be carried out as scheduled, both by Israel and by its neighbors. Each can then use her fair share of the water system to improve her economy and advance the general welfare of her people.

I hope that the water development projects flowing from the technical agreement reached in 1955 can be implemented in an atmosphere of calm and harmony. I am gratified by your reassurances that Israel's project and the amount of the waters withdrawn will be consistent with the plan. Accordingly, the United States Government will use its own good offices in behalf of the project and support United Nations instrumentalities in the area with a view to insuring its peaceful implementation.

It is my conviction that the waters of the Jordan-Yarmuk River System, which have been flowing to waste for so many centuries, can be a constructive force not only for the benefit of the people of the Near East, but can result in an economic cooperation that will mark a small step forward toward the ultimate objective of peace.

In view of the many changes which have taken place since our meeting last year, I would welcome an expression of your own views on the situation in that area, as well as your vantage point.

Sincerely,

John Kennedy(2)

(1) Source: Kennedy Library, National Security Files, Country Series, Israel, 6/2/62- 6/15/62. Personal and Secret.

A handwritten note on the source text indicates that the letter was sent to the Israeli Embassy for Ambassador Harman on June 15. According to the notes of a telephone conversation between Secretary Rusk and Feldman that began at 4:44 p.m. on June 13, "The Sec returned the call. F said the Pres asked about the Ben Gurion letter. F showed him the probable response. Meantime F talked to Harman and he said this is the exact response. F said it was their (his and Sec's) that they had the full letter. [*sic*] Pres said to let it go out now and get on with it. F will send it over now for the Sec to transmit to Harman. Sec asked if paragraphs will be exact and F said yes. Sec asked what about other suggestions. F will talk with him about it again. BG considers himself a world statesman and wants to give his views on Africa, Latin America, etc. Sec said no problem on things not involving the Near East. But he does not like it re prestige of the Pres of the US. F mentioned this to the Pres. F replied letter not to be made public."

(Department of State, Rusk Files: Lot 72 D 192, Telephone Conversations)

(2) Kennedy's signature appears in an unidentified hand, indicating Kennedy signed the original.