

Foreign Relations, 1964-1968, Volume XIX, Arab-Israeli Crisis and War, 1967

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Prewar Crisis, May 15-June 4, 1967

34 Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the United Arab Republic/1/

Washington, May 22, 1967, 8:49 p.m.

/1/Source: National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL ARAB-ISR. Secret; Flash; Nodis. Drafted and approved by Eugene Rostow and cleared by Walt Rostow. Repeated to USUN Eyes Only for Ambassador Goldberg. Walt Rostow sent a copy to the President at 4:30 p.m. with a covering note stating that he had dictated it and sent it to Eugene Rostow's Middle East task force that afternoon. Rostow added: "From previous experience I know Nasser is vulnerable to direct communication from the President of the United States." (Johnson Library, National Security File, Country File, Middle East Crisis, Vol. I) Another memorandum from Walt Rostow to Johnson that evening states that Eugene Rostow and Battle recommended sending messages to Prime Minister Eshkol and Syrian Prime Minister Atasi in case Nasser should release the President's message to him. (Ibid.) Messages from Johnson to Atasi and Eshkol urging restraint were transmitted in telegrams 199728 to Damascus and 199729 to Tel Aviv, both dated May 22. (National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL ARAB-ISR)

199704. Deliver following through quickest means to President Nasser from President Johnson:

"May 22, 1967

Dear President Nasser:

I have spent much of these past days thinking of the Middle East, of the problems you face, and the problems we face in that area.

Various of our common friends, including Ambassador Battle, have told me of your concern that the United States may have indicated an unfriendliness toward the UAR. This, I would wish you to know directly, is far from the truth.

I have watched from a distance your efforts to develop and modernize your country. I understand, I think, the pride and the aspirations of your people-their insistence that they enter as soon as possible the modern world and take their full part in it. I hope that we can find public as well as private ways to work more closely together.

I also understand the political forces at work in your region, the ambitions and tensions, the memories and the hopes.

Right now, of course, your task and mine is not to look back, but to rescue the Middle East-and the whole human community-from a war I believe no one wants. I do not know what steps Secretary General U Thant will be proposing to you; but I do urge you to set as your first duty to your own people, to your region, and to the world community this transcendent objective: the avoidance of hostilities.

The great conflicts of our time are not going to be solved by the illegal crossings of frontiers with arms and men-neither in Asia, the Middle East, Africa, or Latin America. But that kind of action has already led to war in Asia, and it threatens the peace elsewhere.

I had expected that I might ask our Vice President to go to the Middle East to talk with you and other Arab leaders, as well as with the leaders of Israel. If we come through these days without hostilities, I would still hope that visit by my most trusted friend could result immediately.

Each of us who has the responsibility for leading a nation faces different problems shaped by history, geography, and the deepest feelings of our peoples. Whatever differences there may be in the outlook and interests of your country and mine, we do share an interest in the independence and progress of the UAR and the peace of the Middle East.

I address you at this critical moment in the hope that you share that assessment and will find it possible to act on it in the hours and days ahead.

Sincerely, Lyndon B. Johnson"

Rusk