

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

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### 38. Telegram From the Department of State to the Embassy in the Soviet Union/1/

Washington, May 23, 1967, 2:45 a.m.

/1/Source: National Archives and Records Administration, RG 59, Central Files 1967-69, POL 27 ARAB-ISR. Secret; Immediate; Exdis. Drafted by Toon; cleared by Stoessel, Leddy, and Davies; and approved by Eugene Rostow. Repeated Immediate to USUN.

199746. Within past few hours, situation in Middle East has seriously worsened. **Nasser has announced that Gulf of Aqaba will be closed to Israeli flagships, and while we have Israeli commitment to consult with us before attempting to run the blockade, we cannot hope to restrain Israeli action much beyond next 24 hours.** Obviously, Nasser must be restrained from further hostile action if we are to avoid serious flare-up.

We are concerned lest Soviets may not be fully aware of recent Nasser moves and the dangers they hold for peace in the area. Accordingly we believe it would be useful for you to see Gromyko soonest to express our grave concern at deterioration of situation, cataloging for his information following recent moves giving rise to this concern:

1. Egyptians have mounted massive military buildup in Sinai despite fact Israelis at that time had taken no action on their side of frontier that would justify this move.
2. This buildup has increased Egyptian military strength in area from normal level of 30,000 to 50,000.
3. Egyptians have demanded withdrawal of UNEF and SYG has complied.
4. Egyptians have moved naval units south into Red Sea toward entrance to Gulf of Aqaba.
5. Nasser has just announced Gulf would be closed to Israeli flagships, adding that if **"Israelis want war, we welcome it."**

You should inform Gromyko that Sovs themselves have said war in Middle East is in interest of no one. We are doing what we can to avoid flare-up. Purpose of this demarche is to share with Soviets evidence available to us that gives rise to concern. We assume Soviets as anxious as we to avoid further worsening of situation, and that they are aware of our repeated public commitments to support the territorial integrity and political independence for all countries in the Near East, and our opposition to aggression and the use of force and the threat of force against any country.

Rusk